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Blue Demon Jr.'s Identity Crisis

90 Minutes With
Ron Simmons

— INSIDE —

VOLUME 30, 2009

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JOSEPH ROGAN

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Look for the Volume 31, 2009, issue of The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling on sale December 8, 2009



YOUR LETTERS

WALK AWAY, 'TAKER

The article "The Odds Are Set! Who Will Break The Streak?" (Vol. 28, 2009) was a very interesting piece. Unfortunately, The Undertaker has beaten everyone who could have broken the streak.

I think, at this point, 'Taker would be wise to just retire with his streak intact. After all, why put a blemish on his story with a loss when he can walk away and keep the legacy intact?

BRUCE GRAY
Orlando, FL

LET'S BE ROODE

Let me start by saying I've never been a big fan of Robert Roode. When he picked up the Wall Street look, I wasn't impressed. When he joined up with James Storm to form Beer Money Inc., I wasn't impressed. But he continually proved me wrong. This is when I slowly began to turn my view and pay attention to Roode.

Despite all of his tag team success, it seemed as though he was stuck on the mid-card shelf with no hope of getting off. Roode finally proved me wrong for the last time on the July 16 edition of *Impact* when, in the midst of a six-man tag, Roode held his own against Booker T, Scott Steiner, and Kevin Nash.

Though he didn't win the match, Roode came up bigger in the loss by proving he could be a beneficial and dominant member of the heavyweight division and a worthy World title contender.

DAPHNE BOWEN
Raleigh, MS

THE KING OF MEMPHIS

I was recently cruising around the information super highway and stumbled upon Jerry "The King" Lawler's website for his mayoral run in Memphis, Tennessee. I had remembered reading that he may run, so I took a peek at what he had to say.

To say I was surprised at how serious and well-written the letters Lawler wrote to his hopeful constituents would be a gross understatement. Now, I don't know a whole lot about Memphis politics, but I have a feeling that if Lawler can put together a good campaign, he may have a real shot at this.

So good luck, King. Here's to you taking back the city you say you love so much.

BRIAN JONES
Pittsburgh, PA

TARA ROCKS!

I just finished reading the Q&A with Tara (Vol. 29, 2009) and I have to say she is awesome! The stories she must have that didn't make it to print really make me want to meet her. I can't believe that she originally was one of the Godfather's hos.

The path that woman has taken to become one of the top females in the wrestling game today is just simply out of this world. And to look at her now, wow! She has trimmed down and is still performing solidly in a

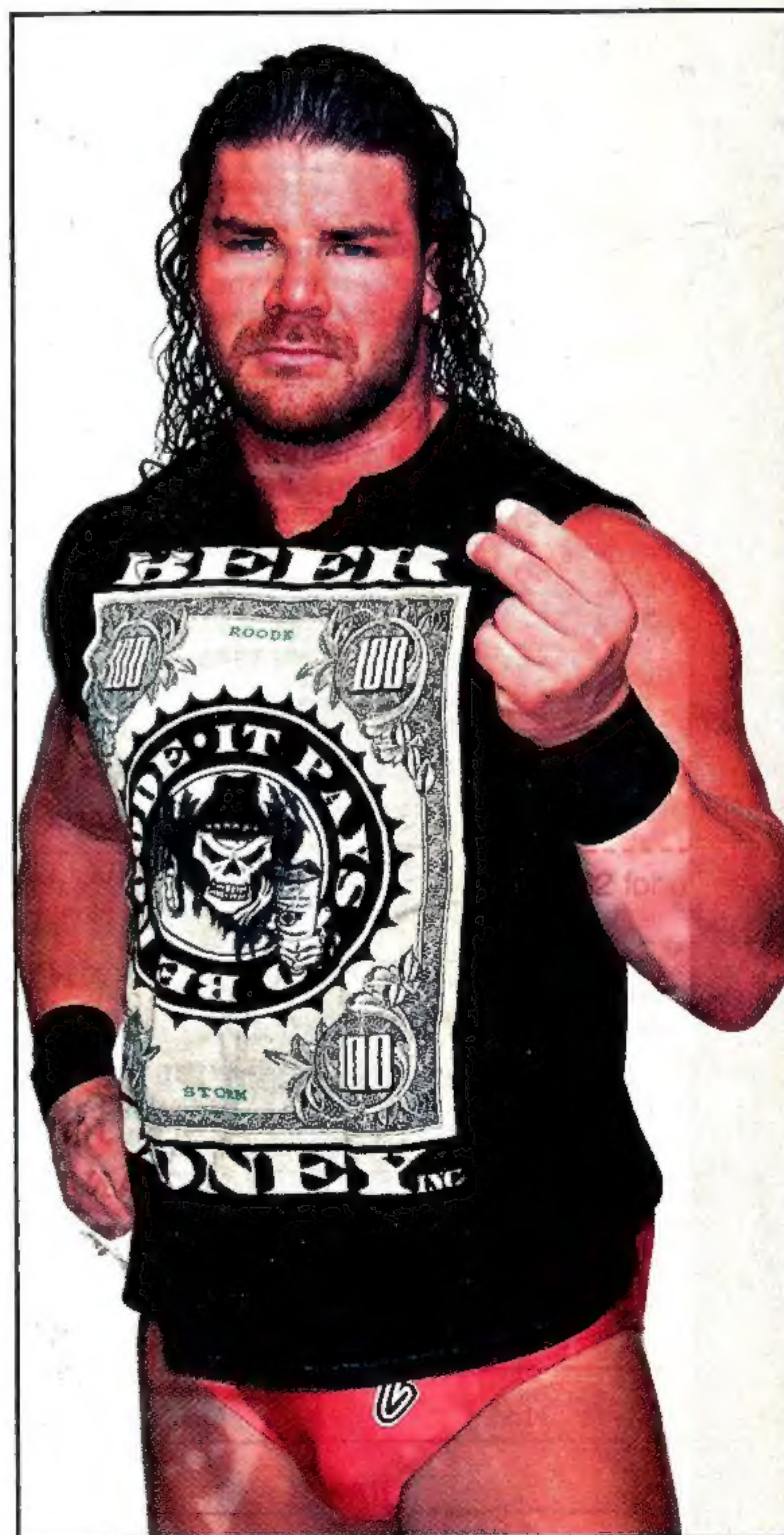


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Reader Daphne Brown from Raleigh, Mississippi, never paid Robert Roode much mind ... until his strong performance against Scott Steiner, Booker T, and Kevin Nash in a six-man tag match on *Impact*.

SEND LETTERS TO: **YOUR LETTERS**

P.O. BOX 96, FORT WASHINGTON, PA 19034
OR E-MAIL LETTERS TO wrestlrmag@yahoo.com

whole new promotion.

I hope that Tara gets back the Knockouts title. She seems like a strong and confident woman who should be an example for young girls everywhere!

BRITTANY MARTIN
Fort Lauderdale, FL

THE ROYAL SCAM

I am by no means a fan of William Regal, nor am I an especially big fan of Christian. However, after watching their ECW title match at SummerSlam, I can't help but feel that the official in that match slighted Regal.

The opening bell should have never sounded until Regal removed his robe completely. It's a miracle Christian didn't pin Regal even sooner considering Regal still had his arms tangled up in his robe when the bell was rung!

I feel that the fans were slighted as well. They paid good money to watch a championship match between two of WWE's finer technical wrestlers. To see the bout end in such a bogus manner before it could even unfold was a disappointment to say the least, although I can't fault Christian for seizing an advantage. That's what championship-caliber wrestlers do.

DEITER KRUPF
Minneapolis, MN □



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Tara has impressed legions of fans over her career, but reader Brittany Martin of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, was so impressed by the manner in which the former Victoria handled herself in our "Q&A" interview, she thinks TNA should give her a Knockouts title shot ASAP.

Stanley Weston

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY JEFF RUOSS ■■■■■

KURT ANGLE HAS worn a lot of gold hardware in his career. Now he has something silver to add to that collection: handcuffs.

Angle was arrested on Saturday, August 15, in suburban Pittsburgh after Robinson Township police found two syringes and vials of Hygetropin—a form of Human Growth Hormone—in his car. The arrest followed a wild turn of events involving his girlfriend, TNA Knockout **Rhaka Khan**.

According to published reports, here's what happened: Khan and Angle have been involved in a tumultuous 10-month relationship. Khan moved into Angle's home in Moon Township, Pennsylvania, but the relationship turned super sour recently. A big fight between the two on August 14 resulted in Khan filing a Protection From Abuse order against Angle. On the morning of August 15, Khan was surfing the web at the local Starbucks when she noticed Angle driving in the parking lot. Feeling threatened, she called the Robinson Township police to report the PFA violation. Upon arrival, the police searched Angle's car, finding the illegal substance and paraphernalia. Angle was arrested and charged with two misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance, one count of possession of drug paraphernalia, harassment, and driving with a suspended license.

The Moon Township police also charged Angle with a second-degree misdemeanor of simple assault and harassment for the Friday fight at his residence.

Angle posted \$1,000 on his \$10,000 bond and then proceeded to wrestle the next day on the TNA pay-per-view. TNA made no mention of the incident on its show and allowed Angle to defend the TNA World title against **Sting** and **Matt Morgan**.

Both Angle and his attorney, **Michael Santicola**, contend that the



Kurt Angle's ex-girlfriend, Rhaka Khan, called Robinson Township police from a Starbucks restaurant, claiming she felt threatened by his presence in the parking lot. Soon after, Angle was arrested.

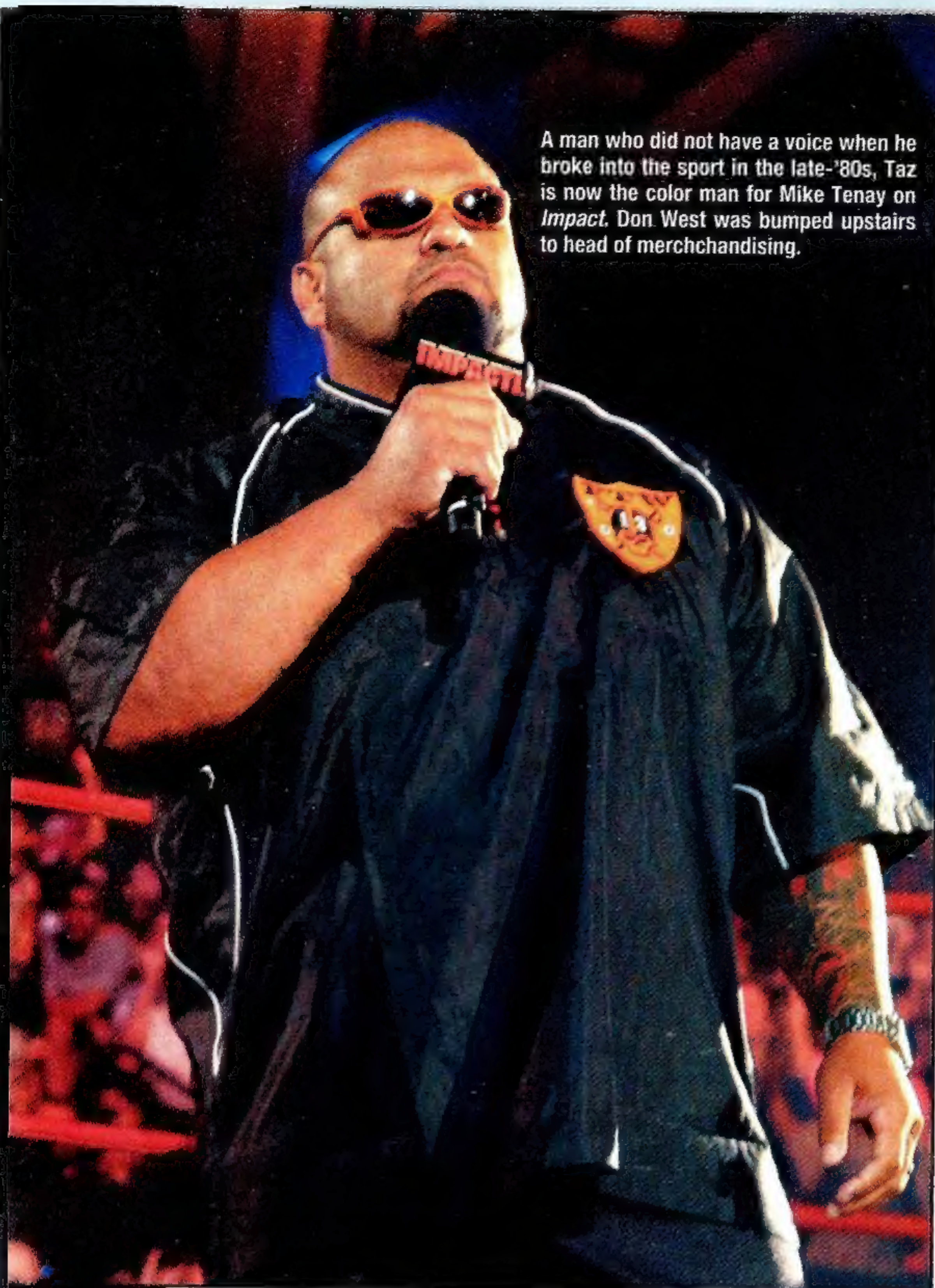
Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Angle was able to successfully defend the TNA World title at Hard Justice against Sting and Matt Morgan after spending nine hours in a jail cell the previous night. Angle faces drug and harassment charges, as well as driving with a suspended license.

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

(THE WRESTLER)



A man who did not have a voice when he broke into the sport in the late-'80s, Taz is now the color man for Mike Tenay on *Impact*. Don West was bumped upstairs to head of merchandising.

HGH was prescribed by a physician to help combat the effects of a neck injury suffered two years ago.

In other TNA news, **Taz** has replaced **Don West** as color commentator alongside **Mike Tenay**. According to tnawrestling.com, West was "promoted" to head of merchandising. Meanwhile, Taz' ascension to the broadcast table is ironic if not unexpected, as his original Tazmaniac character never spoke. Of course, Taz honed his craft as color commentator on *Smackdown* and *ECW* in WWE.

In the wake of **Mitsuharu Misawa's** death, the Japanese government is pressuring the wrestling promotions to give physicals to every wrestler. One major name who might have trouble passing the physical is **Hiroyoshi Tenzan**. Tenzan was injured during the G-1 Climax tournament but he did not bow out of the tournament. Instead, he is now nursing several injuries to various parts of his body, including his eyes, shoulder, and lower back. Tenzan is

expected to take it easy for the next few weeks in order to heal.

Rey Mysterio Jr. was given 30 days off by WWE for violating its Wellness Policy. The suspension went into effect September 2. Although this is Mysterio's first violation and no specifics have been released by WWE, his name had been linked in the past to **Dr. Phil Astin**, who is currently serving a 10-year sentence for illegally supplying prescription medications to **Chris Benoit** and others, as well as **David Wilbirt**, an Arizona physician suspected of prescribing HGH and steroids to several WWE wrestlers.

Not only does the suspension complicate life for Mysterio, it may also have an impact on **Dolph Ziggler**, who was scheduled to challenge for Mysterio's Intercontinental championship at September's *Breaking Point* pay-per-view.

Instead of slowly building the feud and establishing Ziggler as a credible threat to the title, WWE must now get the belt off Mysterio ASAP. Should Ziggler end up with the strap before the suspension goes into effect, the inference will be that the only reason he became champ is because Mysterio got suspended. That's not the kind of setback a budding star like Ziggler needs.

Tara, who had been training for MMA competition before she signed with TNA, is eyeing a bout with **Kim Couture**, the ex-wife of former UFC heavyweight champion **Randy Couture**. Both sides are behaving as if the fight has been signed and the date set, when in reality nothing official has been announced. The women exchanged hostile blog posts recently, with Tara touting her freakish athletic ability and Couture issuing the predictable warning that MMA isn't scripted.

If and when the match takes place, fans will be seeing a much more slender Tara, as she would have to scale down to 135 pounds (Couture's weight). Tara admits that her walk-around weight is in the 150s.

Although, he was making what most people would consider an off-handed remark while celebrating his birthday in the ring on August 24, **Vince McMahon** apparently tweaked the **Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation**.

As two masked **Cirque de Soleil** performers entered the ring on stilts, McMahon said, "Those masks are really gay, by the way" and

Photo By Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Mick Foley (pictured) and Colt Cabana performed before a sellout crowd at the Improv in Hollywood to raise funds for Steve Williams' cancer care.



team partner's name, but we suspect it may be **Bobby McGee**.

The NWA Legends convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, featured the reunion of the greatest members of **The Four Horsemen** for an interview segment as well as photos and autographs. It was amazing to see **Ric Flair**, **Tully Blanchard**, **Arn Anderson**, **Ole Anderson**, and **J.J. Dillon**, as well as **Barry Windham**, all together

Photo by Shane M. Kidder/NWA

later, "Just what every man wants on his birthday."

GLAAD members took McMahon to task on the organization's blog, with one writing: "He wasn't implying the performers were gay, however, he used the term in a derogatory manner. It's just another example of how people throw around the word 'gay' derisively. This came from the leader of a \$500-million-plus organization who holds a lot of power in what he says and what he does."

"The WWE's website states, 'WWE is committed to family-friendly, PG content across all of its platforms including television programming, pay-per-view, digital media, and publishing.' However, off-handedly using 'gay' in a derogatory manner is anything but family-friendly."

GLAAD claims it has reached out to McMahon and the USA network.

"Dr. Death" Steve Williams is once again battling cancer. The cancer has resurfaced in his throat and Williams is undergoing chemotherapy to combat this latest attack.

Mick Foley and **Colt Cabana** apparently both have a good chance at another life beyond wrestling. The duo did standup comedy to a sold-out crowd at the Improv in Hollywood. The proceeds from this event will go to help pay for Williams' treatments.

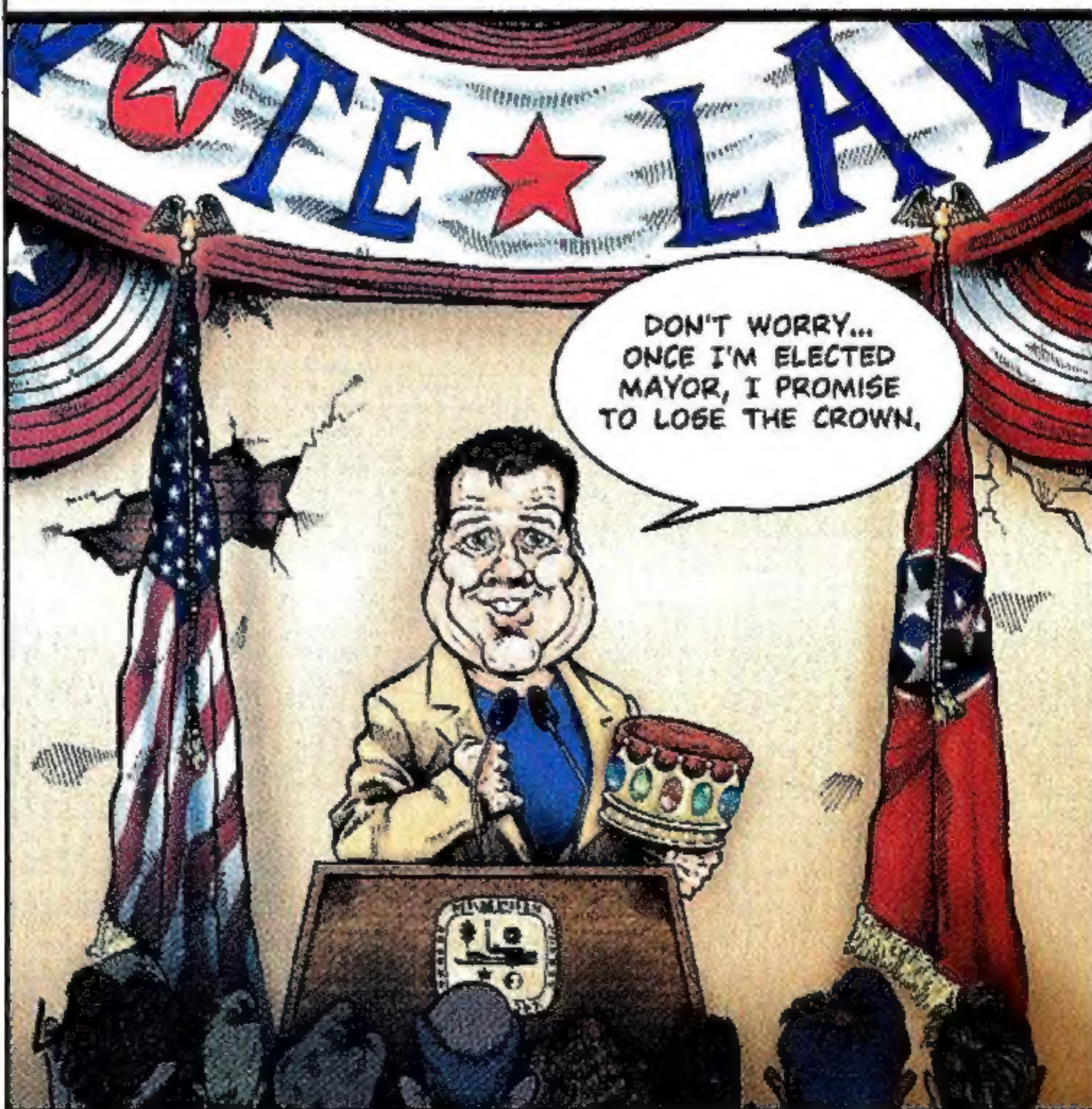
Jody Kristofferson made his pro wrestling debut for All Pro Wrestling in Hayward, California. Jody is the son of actor/singer/songwriter **Kris Kristofferson**. No word yet on a tag

again.

On a final note, **Gladys "Killem" Gillem** passed away on August 12 at the age of 88. Gillem may be best known for her legendary battles with **Mildred Burke**—who was married to promoter **Billy Wolfe**. See, folks, real life marriages crossed over into the ring long before the **McMahon-Helmsleys** came around. Gillem eventually left professional wrestling to join Ringling Brothers as a circus performer. □

"LASHING OUT!"

BY LASH LEROUX



[K R E W - C U T S]

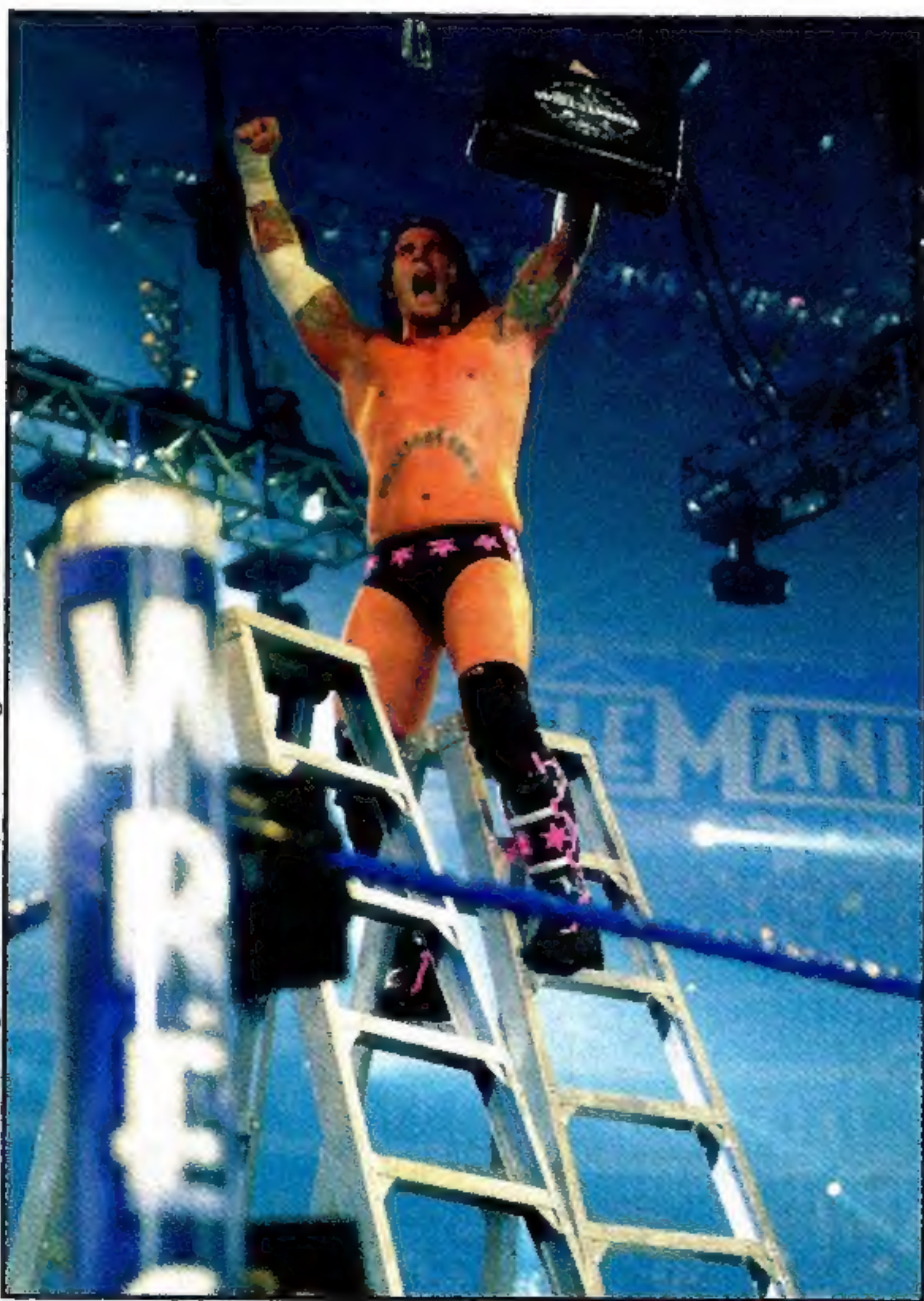
BY FRANK KREWDA

ABOUT 12 YEARS ago, when I first came to *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, we published a newsletter called *PWI Weekly*. In it, we ran a regular section called "Yay And Nay." I thoroughly enjoyed writing that section not just because it consisted of a mere 30 words, but also because its brevity forced me to convey my gut reaction to a wrestler and his/her actions. There was no time for contemplation or waffling. It was like a Cliff's Notes version of "Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down."

Allow me to now offer an expanded and updated version of "Yay And Nay."

Yay to **Christian** for squashing **William Regal** at SummerSlam. Christian showed up ready to wrestle; Regal was more interested in stalling ... Nay to **Vince McMahon**. Birthday or not, the sight of McMahon donning a D-X cap

and yelling, "Suck it!" with **Triple-H** and **Shawn Michaels** erases the entire Attitude Era ... Yay to **C.M. Punk** for his tremendous effort at SummerSlam vs. **Jeff Hardy**. Considering Punk's record in ladder matches, anybody that challenges the champ to such a match is asking for trouble ... Nay to **The Undertaker** for stealing Punk's thunder at SummerSlam. I like 'Taker as much as the next guy, but couldn't he come back the following Friday on *Smackdown*? ... Yay to **Dolph Ziggler** for hanging in against **Rey Mysterio Jr.** despite several close losses. Lesser men would've given up their quest for the Intercontinental title by now ... Nay to Rey Mysterio Jr. He and Ziggler were tearing it up on *Smackdown* and on pay-per-views and house shows, then comes the Wellness Policy violation ... Yay to **Dixie Carter** for giving **Kurt Angle** the benefit of the doubt after he was arrested for violating what amounts to a restraining order. She could have summarily suspended or fired Angle merely on the face of the charges against him, but she patiently waited for his side of the story to emerge ... Nay to Kurt Angle. Whether he is guilty or not of the charges leveled against him, Angle has to acknowledge his celebrity status as well as his role in TNA and avoid highly publicized scandals ... Yay to TNA for promoting **Don West** to its merchandizing department, where he will no doubt do a better job than he did behind a microphone ... Nay to **Lillian Garcia** for erroneously announcing **Randy Orton** as the "new" WWE heavyweight champion after DQ No. 1 in his match with **John Cena** at SummerSlam ... Yay to **Shaq** for delivering big ratings as *Raw*'s guest host ... Nay to **ZZ Top**, who brought less than nothing to the table ... Yay to **MVP** for shutting **Jack Swagger**'s big mouth at SummerSlam ... Nay to Jack Swagger for showing no toughness, grit, or courage in his feud with MVP ... Yay to **Mercedes Martinez** for successfully defending her WSU title in a back-and-forth-40-minute classic against **Nikki Roxx** ... Nay to **Rain** for orchestrating a sneaky post-match attack on Roxx and Martinez ... Yay to **ODB**



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Does anybody really want a piece of C.M. Punk in a ladder match? Maybe if he wants to lose, says Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda, who is impressed by Punk's record in ladder matches.

for finding a way to win the Knockouts championship ... Nay to **Cody Deane** for trying to claim her glory ... Yay to **Ted DiBiase Jr.** and **Cody Rhodes** for aborting another juvenile D-X display ... Nay to D-X for making its 500th reunion ... Yay to **Bryan Danielson** and **Nigel McGuinness** for agreeing to a deal with WWE ... Nay to WWE for targeting ROH talent with contract offers at a time when ROH is most vulnerable ... Yay to **Sgt. Slaughter** for sticking it to the Canadian fans as the guest host of *Raw* in Calgary... Nay to Sgt. Slaughter for selecting **Jillian Hall** to butcher, *er*, sing "America The Beautiful" ... Yay to **Chris Jericho**. While WWE fans may have expected something a bit more unconventional, Jericho's selection of **The Big Show** as his tag team partner was

Photo by Frank Krewda



Mercedes Martinez' recent WSU title defense against Nikki Roxx was a work of art, Krewda says, at least until Rain launched a post-match beatdown on both ladies.

the most logical of all choices ... Nay to Chris Jericho for the incessant gloating and self-glorification that tumbles out every time he opens his mouth, which is *all* the time these days ... Yay to **Hulk Hogan** for at least pretending to have put the nastiness of his divorce behind him ... Nay to **Linda Hogan** and her lawyers, who are now perpetuating the hostilities by suing Hulk to enforce the conditions of their divorce settlement ... Yay to **Matt Hardy** for soldiering through several injuries in recent months before taking time off for some much-needed healing ... Nay to **Batista**, who just can't seem to stay off the injured reserve list ... Yay to **Tommy Dreamer** for continuing to wrestle even after losing the ECW championship to Christian at Night of Champions ... Nay to **Ezekiel Jackson**. Last time we checked, "Zeke" was from Harlem, New York. Why is he so Anti-American? ... Yay to **Great Khali** for coming to **Ranjin Singh**'s aid after he was attacked by **Kane** ... Nay to Kane for attacking Singh, a much smaller non-combatant ... Yay to **Hornswoggle**. Somehow, this pint-sized spark plug has been able to handle

everything **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** has thrown at him ... Nay to Chavo Guerrero Jr., who by now should have found some way to get the better of a midget in at least one of their encounters ... Yay to **The Miz**. He never seemed like the sharpest knife in the drawer, but give "**The Calgary Kid**" some credit for finding a way to outsmart **Eugene** (big deal, I know) and securing a WWE contract ... Nay to Eugene, no, not for being duped by The Miz, but for showing up in WWE for his second run in such poor physical condition that the company fired him—again ... Yay to **New Japan Pro-Wrestling** for deciding to officially recognize **Brutus Magnus** and **Doug Williams** as the IWGP tag team champs after initially refusing because TNA, and not the IWGP, sanctioned their match against **Team 3-D** ... Nay to **The Motor City Machine Guns**. Instead of earning a push through compelling wrestling, **Alex Shelley** and **Chris Sabin** took to sulking on air and at live events ... Yay to **Jesse Neal** for completing his training under **Rhino** to make his pro debut in TNA ... Nay to Rhino for losing an official TNA match to his pupil. □

ON

ASSIGNMENT

NEARLY ONE YEAR ago, I used this column space to argue that the Main Event Mafia was a good thing for TNA.

Sure, Kevin Nash, Booker T, Sting, Scott Steiner, and Kurt Angle (to a lesser degree) were past their primes, but they had star power and presence. By becoming the top rulebreaking faction in TNA, they set themselves up

at the top of the mountain and issued a challenge for the company's fan favorites to step up and knock them down.

Unfortunately, no one could get the job done. The Frontline fizzled—A.J. Styles is mulling retirement, Samoa Joe joined the Mafia, Rhino is losing matches to Jesse Neal. TNA's babyfaces proved to be completely inept.

Blame bad booking (there was plenty of that) or promotional politics, but the fact remains that no one was able to seize the spotlight and emerge as TNA's breakout star. There was no Goldberg or DDP to rise against this New World Order. In fact, most of the TNA babyfaces seem far weaker and less marketable today than they were 12 months ago.

That's not how things were supposed to pan out, and TNA management knows it. Now they are doing everything in their power to help create some new stars and find a savior ... and, once again, they are going about it the wrong way.

Let's start with Bobby Lashley. Lashley has an impeccable amateur wrestling resume, MMA credibility, and WWE experience. He also has a ridiculous physique and headlined one of the top-grossing wrestling events of all-time, though he and Umaga were really just glorified pawns in the "Battle Of The Billionaires" between McMahon and Trump at WM 23.

Lashley is a good acquisition for TNA and a natural opponent for Angle, but his long-term value is minimal. He's made it clear that his heart is in MMA; wrestling to him is just a payday. If he's not entirely committed to wrestling, how much can TNA rely upon him? Besides, one prominent MMA loss can sink his wrestling career overnight. He's a short-term fix for TNA, but he's not the superstar the company desperately needs to usurp the MEM.

The company is also trying to push Matt Morgan to the upper echelon, but Morgan's rise is already being bungled. For months, Morgan has been trying to get into the MEM, and when the MEM refused his initial advances, it made him look like a chump.

Remember Randy Orton's ill-advised 2004 babyface turn? The fans were expected to cheer him simply because Triple-H and Evolution booted him from the group. Orton didn't renounce his rulebreaking ways. He didn't change his character or do anything to make fans care about him. His former friends just dumped him. How are the fans supposed to sympathize with a guy who's been so much of a jerk that even his closest friends don't care about him anymore? Morgan's in the same boat. If he's going to feud with the Mafia, he needs to make a clean break and feud



No question TNA would like to make Lashley its savior, but Senior Writer Liz Hunter views Lashley's star power as a double-edged sword. While his MMA career boosts his credibility in TNA, one loss in the octagon could negatively affect his wrestling career.

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING



with the Mafia. These uneasy alliances and will-he/won't-he turns are killing his potential and ensuring the fans never really warm up to him. After all, it's not like the poor guy is oozing charisma to begin with.

TNA deserves kudos for trying to create new stars like Lashley, Morgan, and Hernandez, but it also deserves

And, for the life of me, I'm confounded by the fact that Daniels has yet to win the TNA World title. With his ability, charisma, and vocal skills, I am convinced the "Fallen Angel" is the greatest wrestler to have never won a world title. Daniels is a born main-eventer, but for some reason TNA is terrified to let him succeed.

Rumor has it that Ken Kennedy may be TNA-bound when his WWE non-compete expires. Here's hoping TNA avoids the same pitfalls it made on the Frontline and gives Kennedy (or Anderson, or whatever name he uses) the chance to shine. And let's hope the spotlight will shine equally on him, Hernandez, Daniels, and the Knockouts, and that the MEM will do what they were supposed to do months ago and pass the torch ... before TNA's torch burns out. ☐

THUMBS UP

Photo by Steve Beyer



THUMBS UP to The Miz. Unfortunately in today's industry, you don't see many wrestlers showcase the type of ingenuity The Miz has in recent months. Determined to stay part of the Raw roster at any expense, Miz earned his "thumbs up" by disguising himself as the Calgary Kid to sneak a shot at a contract with the brand. Emerging victorious must have been just as sweet as pulling one over on the fans for the painfully obnoxious—yet devilishly clever—star. His tactics may be questionable, but the results can't be disputed.

THUMBS UP to Dolph Ziggler. Although he's still a bit goofy, Ziggler earns a "thumbs up" for very quietly making strides as part of the Smackdown roster. For a man who has introduced himself to nearly every human being he's come into contact with, the guy certainly works under a

cloud of obscurity at times. Still, with Intercontinental championship shots under his belt, a budding relationship with Maria Kanellis, and the will to take on nearly all comers, Ziggler's inconspicuous ascent up the Smackdown ladder could surprise some people very soon.



Photo by Duane Long

Photo by Frank Krewda



THUMBS UP to Christy Hemme. It's always a treat when the effervescent Hemme makes her way to ringside. However, now that she's healthy and competing in the ring rather than prancing around it, life is that much better in Orlando. Following a lengthy recovery neck surgery, Hemme returned to action after a seven-month lay-off looking as fit as ever. Although she may not quite be ready to compete for the Knockouts crown, Hemme looked good in her return match, a victory over Sojourner Bolt. Assuming she can stay healthy, Hemme should become a vital piece of the Knockouts division.

THUMBS UP to Yoshi Tatsu. He may not be the most physically intimidating wrestler in ECW, yet his intensity, natural athletic ability, and pedigree have made him an instant fan favorite and definitely worthy of a "thumbs up." After early success in his ECW career, Tatsu hit some-

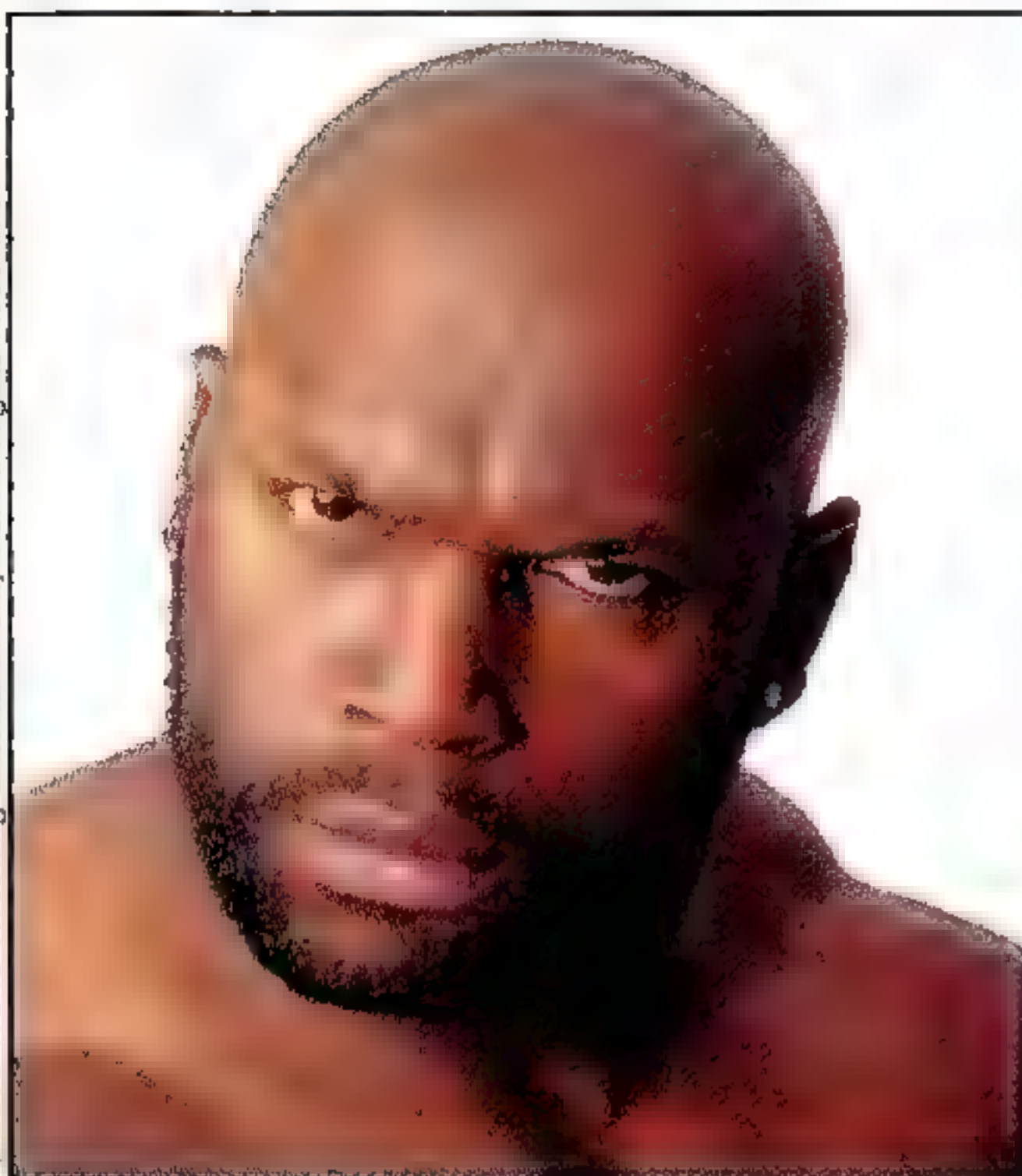
thing of a slump in late-summer with losses to both Shelton Benjamin and Zack Ryder. Still, the 32-year-old veteran of New Japan Pro-Wrestling remained undeterred. His style is unmatched in ECW and, if given the chance, Tatsu could prove to be a very uninviting opponent for those higher in the ratings.



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THUMBS DOWN

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THUMBS DOWN to Ezekiel Jackson. It's not about being mad, rather it is with an immense amount of disappointment that Jackson earns a "thumbs down" for sabotaging what appeared to be a solid run as part of the ECW brand by turning against the fans and Christian. By aligning himself with the likes of William Regal and Vladimir Kozlov, Jackson pigeonholed himself into a position out of which few wrestlers recover. At such an early stage in his WWE career, Jackson has made the move away from the good graces of the fans and teamed up with a militant anti-American group all for a brief glimpse of success.

THUMBS DOWN to Kurt Angle. If Angle doesn't realize yet just how talented he truly is, then maybe he doesn't deserve to have any part of the TNA World title. Constantly trying to ensure he kept the gold, Angle attempted to persuade fellow Main Event Mafia member Matt Morgan to aid him in their three-way title match against Sting at Hard Justice. When the opportunistic Morgan refused, Angle did the next best thing: He clocked his teammate in the head with a steel chair and pinned him for the win. At his best, Angle is unbeatable. Unfortunately, he continues to taint his reputation by taking the low road.

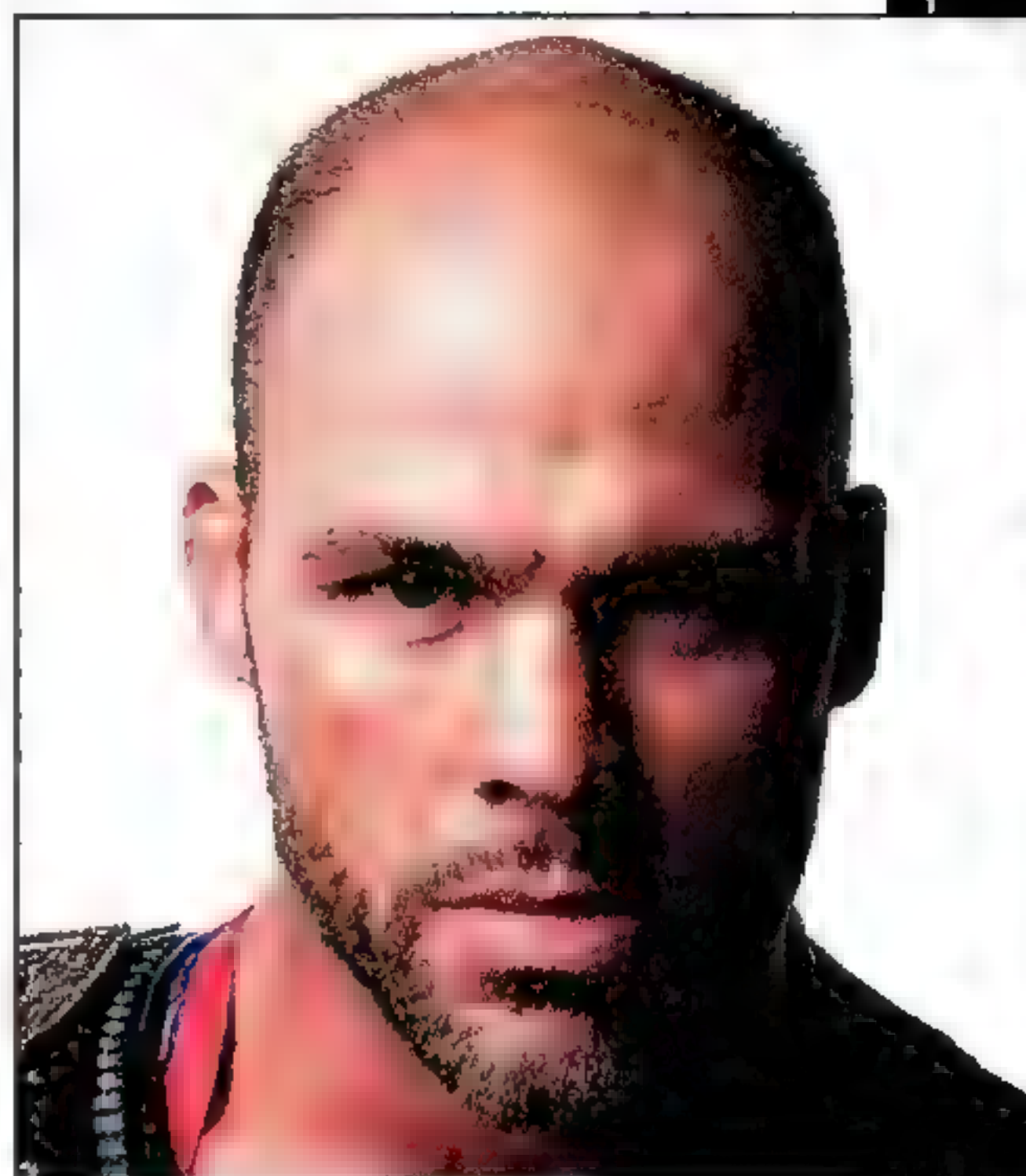


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THUMBS DOWN to Chris Masters. A very triumphant return to "thumbs down" for Masters, who was a mainstay here during his prior stint with WWE. The hope was that given his extended absence from the company, Masters would have used the time to develop himself both as a competitor and a personality. Instead, the Masters of today is little more than a facsimile of the Masters of yesterday, which wasn't exactly the "Masterpiece" it was billed to be. Hopefully, it will not take another hiatus for Masters to realize that a change is needed and fast.

THUMBS DOWN to Kane. When the book is written on his career, Kane



Photo by George Fatibene

could have more "thumbs downs" than anyone in THE WRESTLER's history. Whether it's the despicable way he transitions from creepy ghoul to even creepier psychopath, or if he's simply just torturing an innocent for fun (as in the case of Ranjin Singh), "The Big Red Machine" once again earns this dubious distinction. Most shameful, however, is that Kane appeared to have more potential to become a dominant wrestler for much of his career, but that he frittered away the opportunities in order to feed his maniacal rage. Career success generally isn't measured in the amount of nightmares inflicted. □



Photo by Duane Long

P O I N T:

THE RAW GUEST HOST CONCEPT IS A WINNER

BY AL ALVEN

LET'S FACE IT. John Cena is right. *Raw* had been rather stale for some time.

Blame it on any number of the usual factors—an endless main event cycle featuring the same faces, an ever-widening disparity in the ratio of backstage/talky segments vs. actual wrestling, etc.

Whatever the reason, *Raw* was in desperate need of a catalyst by late-spring, something that could kick-start and breathe new life into the product. And it found just what it needed with the new guest host concept.

The idea is so simple, yet so novel. Every single show now has an automatic hook. There is a different feel to the proceedings depending on who is hosting, and no one knows just how the show is going to be run, how the host will interact with the wrestlers, what matches will be made, and what the ramifications of the decisions rendered will be ... until it all actually happens.

This not only makes the shows more fresh and interesting, it builds anticipation. And *that* is what good

“episodic television” is all about!

That Vince McMahon has decided to alternate guest hosting honors between mainstream celebrities and names from the wrestling world only enhances the dynamic. Fans likely weren't sure what to expect from men such as Seth Green, ZZ Top, and Freddie Prince Jr., but the ratings increase that coincided with the onset of the guest host experiment proves that curiosity is a good thing.

When word got out that Ted DiBiase would be hosting *Raw*, wrestling message boards and social networks lit up with debate on what his motives would be. It was the same with Sgt. Slaughter.

The best reactions of all, however—at least from McMahon's perspective—have to be those of the media outlets that have absolutely eaten up the initial wave of celebrity involvement. McMahon knows that the best publicity can't be bought, but it sure can generate residual dollar signs.

On that note, there are also the long-term booking possibilities that present themselves. After Shaquille O'Neal dropped Big Show it immediately touched off speculation of a future match between the two giants.

Jeremy Piven and his sidekick, Dr. Ken Jeong saw their plans to double-cross John Cena backfire, and have vowed revenge. While Cena vs. either or both Piven and Jeong will never headline WrestleMania, it has created another fun little subplot.

Names such as Bob Barker and Rev. Al Sharpton have been kicked around as possible future hosts. The mere idea allows fans to let their imaginations run wild.

Or what would it be like to have Hulk Hogan return to the spotlight for one night to run *Raw*?

The possibilities are literally endless. *Al Alven is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.*

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While Jeremy Piven and Dr. Ken were the best in-ring performers among the guest hosts, they certainly riled up the crowd.

C O U N T E R P O I N T :

INAPPROPRIATE GUESTS RUIN THE WHOLE THING

BY BRADY HICKS

ON PAPER, THE guest host concept is a winner. No question.

What WWE has to be careful about is choosing appropriate guest hosts at the right time, not just a celebrity who has a new TV show or movie to promote, or others who just so happen to be big wrestling fans.

Ideally, we'd see less celebrity involvement and more episodes of *Raw* featuring people from within the industry in charge.

Raise your hand if you were able to make it through the entire episode that featured ZZ Top members Dusty Hill and Billy Gibbons without changing the channel once or twice—or, at least, without seriously thinking about it. Aside from a brief, and rather pointless, introduction to the fans and a 30-second "concert" at the very end of the show, Hill and Gibbons did nothing, essentially, but participate in lame comedic bits with Santino Marella all evening.

Hill and Gibbons were just not good choices to stand in front of the camera and act as general managers; someone apparently figured this out before the show, hence the reason their segments were shot almost exclusively in the back.

The following week, Shaquille O'Neal acquitted himself very well as guest GM. He displayed a true understanding of the current WWE product and came off as a natural performer.

While Shaq is one of the few current pro athletes who transcends his sport in certain respects, wouldn't it have made much more sense for him to host in a city he has more of a connection to? Perhaps one of his former NBA stops, such as Orlando, Los Angeles, Miami, or Phoenix?

Jeremy Piven and sidekick Dr. Ken Jeong were anything but shy about performing in front of a live audience. But that didn't make them good choices to host, either. While Piven has earned rave reviews for his per-



If WWE really wants this guest host idea to work, the company should use former big-time wrestlers like Sgt. Slaughter.

formances as Ari Gold in HBO's *Entourage* and came to *Raw* to promote his new movie, *The Goods*, he is still not exactly a household name. Hence the confused reactions by many fans when he was named to host.

While the guest host concept certainly has the potential to create some memorable moments, this particular episode will be remembered mainly for Piven's instantly infamous "SummerFest" flub. It sure didn't make the company look very good when one of their chosen celebrity guests couldn't even get the name of its second biggest show of the year correct.

This was an example of how the guest hosting concept is going to struggle at times, because celebrities tend to be polarizing figures. While some might find a Seth Green or a Freddie Prince Jr. to be entertaining, others simply may not. Put simply, the guest host becomes way too much of a factor as to whether or not a given *Raw* is a success.

Brady Hicks is a contributing writer for *THE WRESTLER*. □

INTRODUCING

STEVE OFF

AT JUST 13 years of age, Steve Off had an experience that few in this sport can claim. As a favor to the boy's father, tough guy pro wrestler Low-Ki agreed to give the youngster a few minutes of sparring. Though the 21-year-grappler was not out to do any damage of his own, little Stevie could hardly be described as the most coordinated of children, often tripping over his own feet when he tried to do something athletic.

That was Steve Off's life as an adolescent: determined to play sports but not big enough or athletic enough to be much more than a role player on any of his teams.

But nine years ago, all that mattered to Steve Off was that he was standing mid-ring, pretending to pound on a man who was actually living his dream as a real, live wrestler.

"It's so sad that I can't even say I learned anything from the experience," Off recently recalled. "I was so young, and all I kept thinking was, *This guy could totally squash me if he wanted to.*"

That feeling was hardly new to a youngster that was looked upon by most as undersized and un-athletic while growing up in Cliffside Park, New Jersey. In spite of his passion for getting on the field, he often found himself laughed at or teased by his peers for lack of coordination.

"It wasn't long before I got on this kick where I wanted to be a wrestler," said Off, who now stands 6' tall and weighs 215 pounds. "Of course, many thought that was totally laughable, since I was already undersized and unable to show I could excel at anything. Even after I'd been wrestling for a few years, many of my friends said



BY BRADY HICKS

PHOTOS BY CATHYJO ANTOLOS

they didn't even see me making it on the independent wrestling scene, let alone signing with one of the bigger wrestling companies."

But what Off once lacked physically, he made up for with desire. Using the connections he established at Bodyslam University, where he signed up at age 16, Off secured a tryout in front of WWE officials prior to a show in Newark, New Jersey, and was also asked to serve as a security guard on *Raw* during Vince McMahon's "Battle Of The Billionaires" WrestleMania buildup with Donald Trump.

Even though Off was not offered a contract for his efforts at the time, the experience allowed him to take a peak at the view from the top of the proverbial mountain, and Off came away believing he has what it takes to make it to the pinnacle of the wrestling industry on his own two feet.

Along the way, he hopes to prove that there are other ways—beside size and presence—for young wrestlers to get a crack at the big time.

To this day, Off continues to train at BU as a wrestler, and serves as an assistant trainer alongside former ECW and WWE star Nunzio. When Off first enlisted six years ago, he believed it would actually be a relatively easy path to a career in the wrestling business. His plan was to break in by competing in BU's affiliated Bodyslam Wrestling Organization (BWO) promotion. As it turned out, the 16-year-old's wrestling training consisted almost entirely of taking bumps. Off soon found his BU sessions less inviting than his private sessions with Low-Ki three years before.

What Off quickly came to realize was that his trainers (including Kaos and Richie Rotten) weren't really trying to hurt him. They were just giving him a few things to chew on as he pondered a career as a wrestler. "They were all so much bigger than me," the multiple-time BWO heavyweight champion added. "I got the sense they could have definitely hurt me pretty badly if they wanted to. They just weren't interested in that at all. I guess they just wanted to make sure I wasn't a quitter."

What Off claims his trainers did not realize was that they were just another small obstacle for him to overcome. In his eyes, they were no different than the teammates from his youth who laughed at his lack of athleticism on the field, or the friends who laughed at his small frame when he talked about becoming a wrestler.



Even though Steve Off has grown to a respectable 6', 215 pounds, he is often at a severe size disadvantage against men like Don Montoya. Still, the determination that has always been part of his make-up has led him to several BWO championships.

Whether it is by landing a big contract with WWE, TNA, Ring of Honor, or some other promotion, Off hopes his charisma, magnified by national TV, will help make him a household name among wrestling fans. "I'm willing to be patient about it because I don't think it will happen today or tomorrow, or even the next day," he said. "I may never even be a main-event guy. But I think I should be able to get there, someday." □

WORKING STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

IN *THE RISE And Fall Of WCW* DVD, several WWE stars step in front of the camera to rant about how screwed up things were in World Championship Wrestling and the poor decisions that led to the once-dominant company's demise.

On a recent press tour, even TNA's Kevin Nash took some jabs at WCW, saying his tenure as the

company's creative head was doomed to fail because of WCW's inept management.

The irony is, for as much as people in the wrestling business pile on WCW, many of them have not learned from its mistakes.

Even after WWE started nipping at WCW's heels during the Monday Night War, WCW refused to elevate fresh talent into its main event scene—instead headlining one pay-per-view after the next with the same aging millionaires such as Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage. The reluctance to create new stars proved to be one of the leading causes of its downfall.

As of press time, there has not been a solitary pay-per-view main event on the Raw brand in 2009 that has not involved John Cena, Triple-H, or Randy Orton (and more times than not, it's involved more than one of them). It's not much different over in TNA, where Kevin Nash, Mick Foley, Kurt Angle, and Sting—none of whom are under 40—usually occupy the top of the cards.

Even Ring of Honor may be guilty of falling into some of the same pitfalls that plagued WCW. ROH has spent an inordinate amount of time, money, and energy promoting appearances by stars of the 1980s and '90s, like Ric Flair and Bret Hart, and has featured ex-WWE stars like D-Lo Brown and Jerry Lynn more prominently than many homegrown talents. There's no defending the self-destructive decisions that put WCW out of business. But there's an old saying about those who don't learn from history.

Speaking of Nash—While it may just be a word on a gold belt, Nash's two runs with TNA's Legends title has begged the question: Is Nash truly a legend? Looking back on the controversial wrestling career of the now 50-year-old big man, I dare say he has earned that status.

By most standards, Nash may not be considered a first-ballot hall of famer. He never became a household name, had few truly great ring performances, and seemed to set political fires wherever he went. But unlike many other veterans that may be better regarded, few have had as big an impact on the sport as Nash has—for better or for worse.

As "Diesel," Nash wore the WWF World championship for nearly a year. No champion would even approach as long a reign for more than a decade. His



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Contributing Writer Al Castle feels that Kevin Nash's influence on the industry, not just his wrestling credentials, have earned him legendary status.



success in a WWF ring in the 1990s was largely due to the political power he wielded backstage through his alliance with Triple-H, Shawn Michaels, Scott Hall, and Sean Waltman. Their fingerprints were on the WWF product as a whole during that period nearly as much as Vince McMahon's.

Nash's political power only grew when he went to WCW and, with Hall and Hulk Hogan, created the New World Order—a faction that would lead WCW to unprecedented success. That success led to a complete overhaul of the pay structure for top-name wrestlers. John Cena can thank Nash, in part, for the hefty paycheck he receives today.

Nash's influence may have subsided considerably over the past decade, which has included a return to WWE and his TNA career. But even today, few people in the sport have the savvy and the survival skills that Nash does. Against a quality opponent, such as A.J. Styles, he knows the secrets to having a good match, even with a broken-down body. And against a limited opponent, like Mick Foley, he knows how to get out of a bad match with his star power intact.

While his motives may sometimes be questionable, Nash always knows how to maximize his value in the eyes of fans, colleagues, and management.

That's a lesson you don't learn in wrestling school.

On the subject of legends, it strikes me that—in an era when bona fide “dream matches” are a scarce commodity—WWE has the opportunity to pit two of the greatest wrestlers the sport has ever seen against each other, but has so far failed to do so. And unlike other big bouts that are worth saving for a special occasion, the time to make this match may be now or never.

I speak of Shawn Michaels vs. Ricky Steamboat.

Earlier this year, I was assigned to compile a feature for this magazine about the “20 All-Time WrestleMania Dream Matches” (*Inside Wrestling* Volume 27, 2009). When I began compiling my list, my first, and easiest, pick was Michaels-Steamboat.

The match between two of the most athletic, exciting, and inspiring wrestlers should be near the top of any longtime wrestling fan's wish list. But, as I put pen to paper, I did so with the belief that the match was as impossible to put together as Randy Orton vs. Bruno Sammartino—another on my list.

Just a few short weeks after completing the



Photo by Matt Roberts

Rick Steamboat, still donning his “Dragon” garb, made thousands stand up and cheer at WM25. Castle says now is the time to put him against Shawn Michaels, who may soon be retiring.

assignment, I sat in Reliant Stadium and watched a 56-year-old Steamboat bring 70,000 fans to their feet in his first match in 15 years at WrestleMania 25. Amazingly, “The Dragon” was back.

Steamboat looked like his old self when he took on Chris Jericho at Backlash the following month. Since then, he has returned to the ring at a number of WWE live events, and picked up several wins.

With Steamboat in his mid-50s, and Michaels in his mid-40s and, by some accounts, contemplating retirement, WWE may only have the smallest of windows in which to make this match—long considered an impossibility—a reality.

There is no time to waste.

□

SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

JOHN CENA



Photo by Jan Sanders

February 2000: The Prototype debuts in UPW. Cena's bodybuilder physique and intensity make the semi-robotic character a hit in the California-based indy promotion.

BORN IN WEST Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1977 ... One of five athletically gifted sons that excelled at youth sports ... Was a Division III All-American center for the Springfield College football team of Springfield, Massachusetts ... Jersey number 54 would become a running theme later in his career ... Parlayed collegiate success into a post-graduate career in bodybuilding ... Started formal pro wrestling training in 2000 ... Worked primarily with Ultimate Pro Wrestling in California during the early stages of career ... Went by the ring name The Prototype ... Captured the UPW heavyweight title in 2000 ... Brief stint with UPW garnered interest from the WWF ... Signed with the WWF and debuted with developmental territory Ohio Valley Wrestling in 2001 ... Continued The Prototype gimmick primarily in OVW ... Held both the OVW heavyweight and tag titles during his year in developmental ... Received call up to the WWE roster in 2002 ... Participated in Kurt Angle's open challenge ... Failed to win, but earned the fans' respect ... Feuded with Chris Jericho briefly in first consistent action on the main roster ... Paired with, then turned against, Billy Kidman to become a full-fledged rulebreaker for first time with WWE ... Developed gimmick as rapper ... Irritated fans and opponents alike ... Ranted in promos about his ability and called out competitors ... Added Bull Buchanan as bodyguard ... Chased Brock Lesnar and his WWE title throughout 2003 ... Unveiled FU finisher during feud with Lesnar ... Intentionally similar to Lesnar's F5 finishing move ... Failed to capture the title throughout the feud ... Referred to himself as "Doctor Of Thuganomics" ... Co-winner of battle royal with Chris Benoit for number-one contender position ... Lost the spot to Benoit a week later ... Shed rulebreaking ways by Survivor Series 2003 ... Member of Kurt Angle's team of fan favorites at the pay-per-view ... Remained a fan favorite from that point on ... Called out Big Show in late-2003 ... Insulted and attacked Big Show throughout the winter ... Fared well at 2004 Royal Rumble ... Reached final six before elimination ... Feuded with The Big Show through WrestleMania XX ... Won U.S. title from Big Show at the event, his first singles championship as part of the main roster ... Feuded with Rene Dupree over the gold throughout the spring ... Stripped of the title four months later by then-Smackdown GM Angle ... Accidentally knocked down the wheelchair-bound GM during a fight ... Recaptured gold following best-of-five series with Booker

JOHN CENA



Photo by Matt Roberts



February 2002: Displaying more and more athletic ability, The Prototype captures his first and only OVW heavyweight championship.

T ... Lost the title to Carlito a week later ... Involved in feud that resulted in a stabbing by Carlito's bodyguard ... Returned to action a month later to retake the gold from Carlito ... Fared even better in 2005 Royal Rumble two months later ... Eliminated as part of final two by Batista in controversial finish ... Defeated Angle at No Way Out for the Smackdown number-one contender's spot ... Earned WWE title shot at WrestleMania XXI ... Started long feud with then-champion John Bradshaw Layfield ... Lost the U.S. title to JBL associate Orlando Jordan ... Defeated JBL at 'Mania to win first world title ... Debuted new spinner WWE heavyweight title belt shortly thereafter ... Announced presence with "The champ is here!" ... Successfully defended the WWE title against JBL at Judgment Day ... Traded to Raw in early-2005 ... Partnered briefly with Jericho ... Feuded with then-Raw GM Eric Bischoff ... Entered feud with Jericho over WWE title ... Culminated with a victory over Jericho in a "You're Fired" match on *Raw* in late-2005 ...

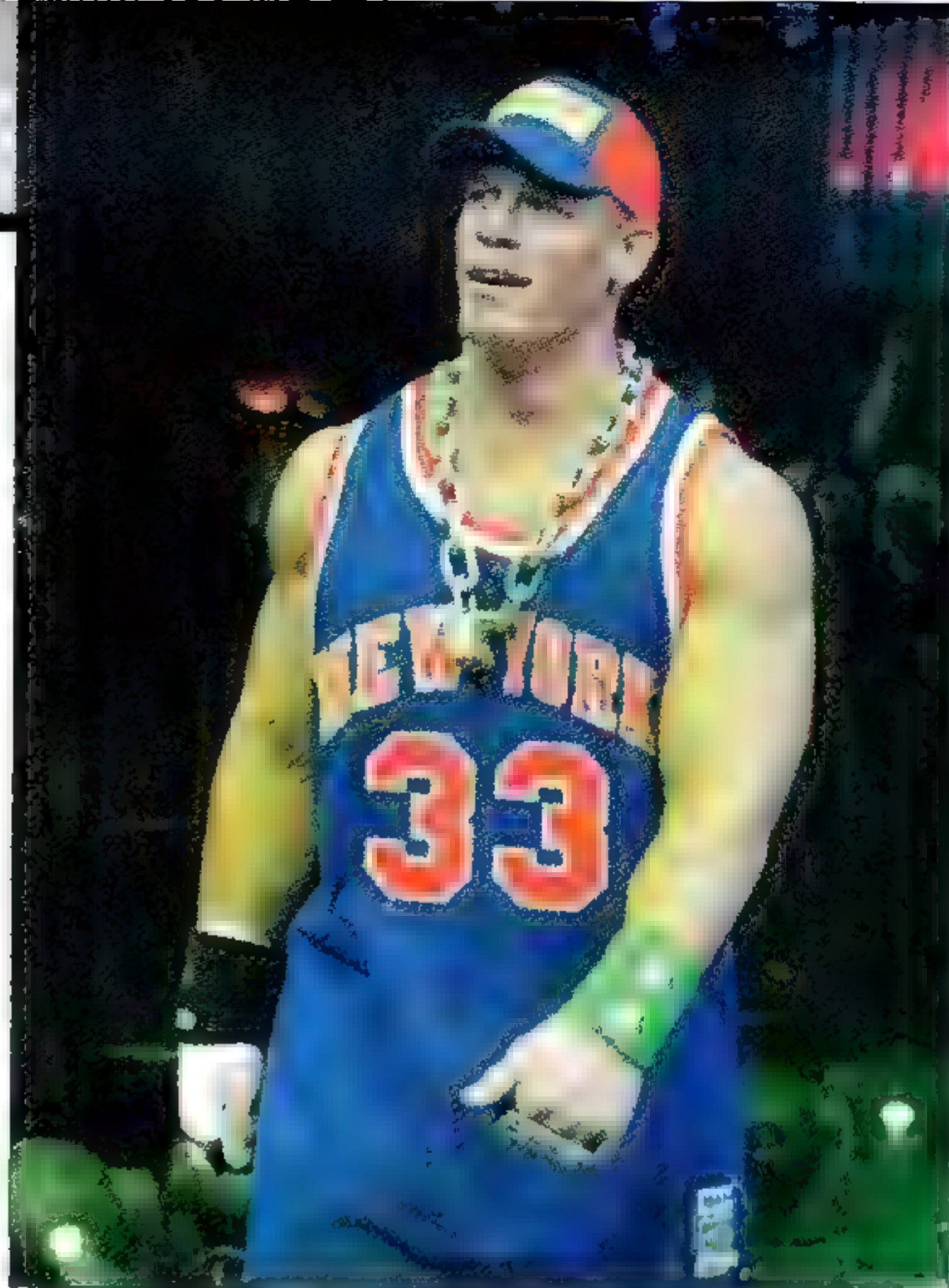


Photo by George Napolitano

October 2002: After debuting in an Angle Challenge match, Cena takes on a white rapper gimmick. Though he was a fan favorite, fans soon grew tired of the act and turned on him.

Dominated Angle in a series of defenses ... Developed submission hold to add to repertoire, debuted STFU in late-November 2005 ... Retained the title in Elimination Chamber match at New Year's Revolution 2006 ... Lost the title later in the night to Edge who cashed in money in the bank title shot ... Helped disrupt Edge and Lita's live sex celebration of the victory the following night ... Recaptured championship less than a month later



Photo by George Napolitano

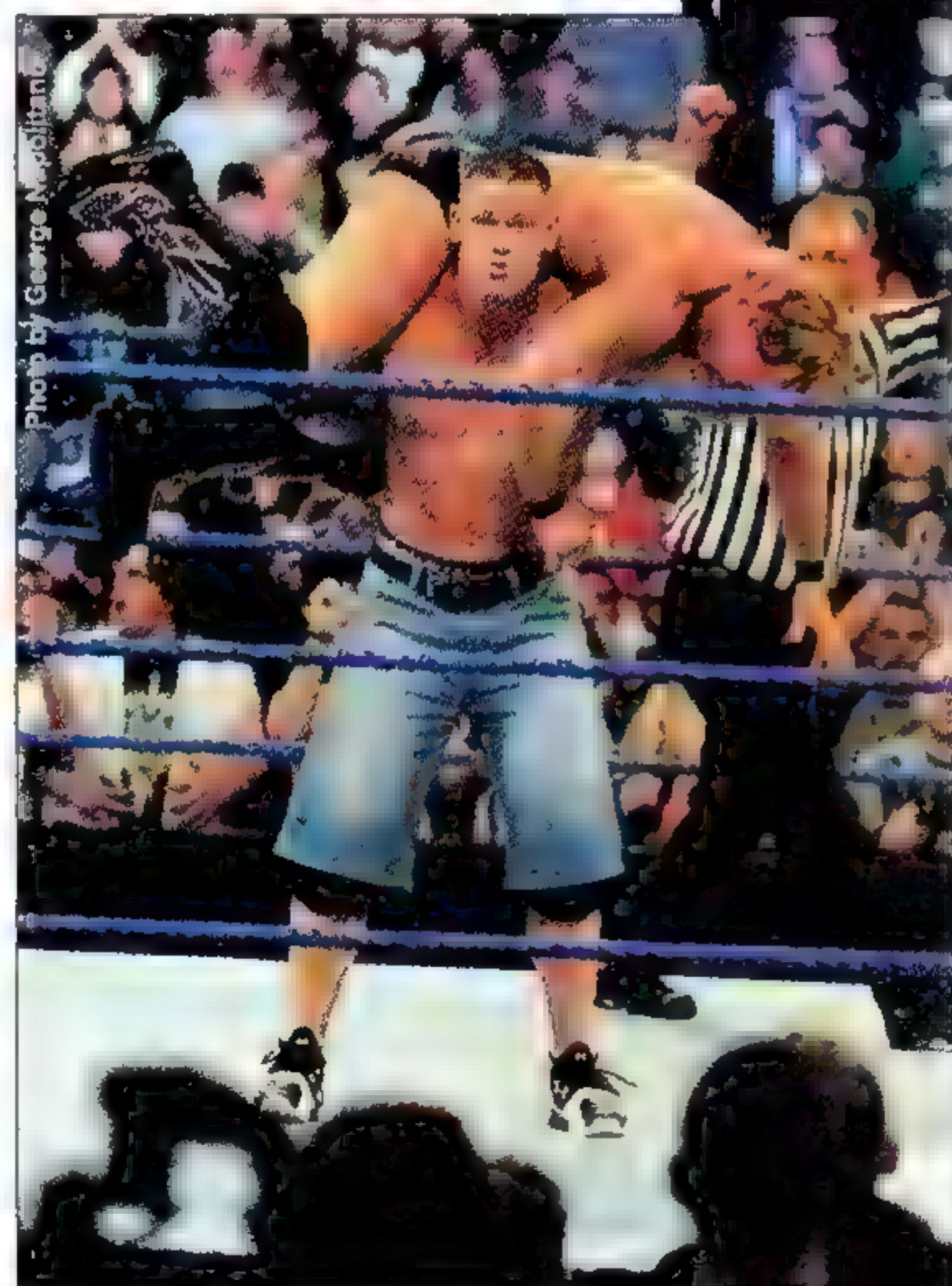
October 2004: After dropping his U.S. title (due to running afoul of then-GM Kurt Angle), Cena regained the belt from Booker T in a best-of-five series.



June 2005: Cena is drafted to the Raw brand with the number-one pick by then-GM Eric Bischoff. Instead of happy times, "The Champ" begins a bitter feud with the GM when he refuses to take part in the ECW invasion.

at the Royal Rumble ... Feuded with both Triple-H and Rob Van Dam in mid-2006 ... Defeated Triple-H in main event at WrestleMania 22 ... Lost gold to Van Dam at ECW's One Night Stand ... Both crowds were heavily in favor of opponents ... Failed to recapture title in three-way match with Van Dam and Edge a month later ... Won the title at Unforgiven shortly thereafter ... Involved in unique inter-brand championship feud ... Competed with ECW champion The Big Show and WWE World champion Booker T in three-way feud ... Culminated in triple threat match at Cyber Sunday ... Warded off Britney Spears' then-husband Kevin Federline at same time ... Failed to capture the heavyweight title at Cyber Sunday when Federline interfered ... Entered feud with Umaga throughout end of 2006 ... Lost to Federline thanks to assist from Umaga ... Ended Samoan's undefeated streak at New Year's Revolution 2007 ... Partnered with Shawn Michaels to win the World tag team title ... Contentious relationship came to blows at WrestleMania 23 ... Retained the WWE championship ... Michaels turned against Cena and cost the team the gold ... Warded off Michaels, Randy Orton, Edge, and The Great Khali following 'Mania ... Ended Khali's undefeated streak at Judgment Day 2007 ... Followed it up with repeat victory at One Night Stand in June ... Briefly feuded with Bobby Lashley in July 2007 ... Retained the WWE title over Lashley at The Great American Bash ... Successfully defended the title in feud with Orton ... Tore pectoral muscle in match with Ken Kennedy in October, but finished the match ... Stripped of title the following night on ECW ... Projected

to miss seven to 12 months of action for recovery, but made surprise return to action at 2008 Royal Rumble ... Won the match for first time in career ... Cashed in title shot against then-champion Orton at No Way Out but DQ victory did not garner him the championship ... Failed to capture gold in three-way bout with Triple-H and Orton at WM24 ... Lost, again, in Fatal Four-way WWE title match at Backlash ... Renewed old feud with JBL and beat him at Judgment Day and One Night Stand, but Lost at The Great American Bash ... Feud ended by late-summer 2008 ... Teamed with Batista to capture World tag team championship from Legacy in August 2008 ... Defeated by former partner Batista at SummerSlam ... Became a contender to World champion C.M. Punk ... Planned to participate in Championship Scramble match at Unforgiven ... Herniated disc in neck prevented that from happening ... Out of action



November 2008: After herniating a disk in his neck, Cena returns at the Survivor Series to take down WWE World champion Chris Jericho and claim the tile.

following surgery ... Returned at Survivor Series 2008 ... Captured first-ever WWE World championship from then-titleholder Jericho ... Successfully defended gold through Armageddon ... Lost the gold at No Way Out in an Elimination Chamber match ... Late entrant Edge was victorious ... Worked way into Smackdown main event match at WrestleMania XXV ... Embarrassing photos of then-GM Vickie Guerrero did the trick ... Recaptured the World title in a triple threat match with Edge and Big Show at 'Mania ... Lost the gold back to Edge at Backlash when Big Show interfered ... Gained revenge on Big Show at Judgment Day ... Victorious in a submission match over Big Show at Extreme Rules in June 2009 ... Failed to recapture the WWE World title in a triple threat match at Night of Champions ... Fielded challenges from The Miz throughout summer ... Defeated The Miz in a Beat the Clock Challenge match to earn a title shot ... Victorious over The Miz despite interference by guest host Jeremy Piven ... Re-entered feud with Orton over the WWE World title ... Fought off both Jericho and Big Show while focused on Orton ... Paired with Orton to beat Jericho and Big Show on late-summer episode of *Raw* ... Attacked by Orton following the victory ... Given shot at Orton and WWE World championship at SummerSlam 2009 where the champ managed to outwit both Cena and McMahon and retain his title.



June 2009: After weeks of taunting from The Miz, Cena finally gave him the match he wanted at The Bash. It didn't end too well for The Miz, as he found himself flat on his back trying to see "The Champ" through all the stars floating above his head.



August 2009: After months of battling, Cena finally gained the right to face World champion Randy Orton one-on-one at SummerSlam for a shot at the title. Orton took advantage of outside interference from Brett DiBiase to retain his title.

[Q & A]

RON SIMMONS

"Sometimes you just have to say ... Damn!"

SMOKING CIGARS, DRINKING beer, and playing cards were a way of life for Ron Simmons, who spent several years as a good-natured bad-ass teaming with Bradshaw in WWE. He's the cool dude you'd like to sit beside at the corner bar, witty enough to make the best wisecracks and tough enough to get away with it.

Unfortunately, his entertaining antics have overshadowed his most important achievements. WWE has largely ignored Simmons' distinction as the first African-American world heavyweight champion in the industry, and that he was a heralded college football player. The Florida State Seminoles retired his jersey—number 50—in 1988. Simmons also played for the NFL's Cleveland Browns, the CFL's Ottawa Rough Riders, and the USFL's Tampa Bay Bandits before injuries and other circumstances forced him out.

After settling on pro wrestling as his next option, he trained under respected taskmaster Hiro Matsuda and debuted in 1986. The "All-American" won the Florida State title before heading northward to WCW. He remained a fan favorite until 1989, when he and Butch Reed donned masks and became Doom, a rulebreaking team managed by Woman. Despite considerable success, including a nine-month WCW World tag team title reign, the partners eventually had a falling-out, with Simmons becoming a fan favorite again.

A short time later, Simmons powerslammed Big Van Vader to win the WCW World heavyweight title in Baltimore on August 2, 1992. He reigned as World champion for five months, losing the strap back to Vader on December 30 of the same year.

Simmons spent a brief time in ECW before entering the WWF in 1996. Initially named Faarooq Asad and paired with Sunny (Tammy Sytch), he was more successful after he dropped the "Asad" surname and became leader of The Nation of Domination. His feud with fellow member The Rock ended up launching Dwayne Johnson's career.

With The Rock as the Nation's new leader, Faarooq was among a group of mid-carders—dubbed "Acolytes"—shuffled into The Undertaker's Ministry of

Darkness. He and fellow member Bradshaw formed an effective duo, however, and enjoyed the high life as The Acolyte Protection Agency, two tough guys for hire.

When Bradshaw was elevated to main-event status as the evil John Bradshaw Layfield, Simmons reverted to using his real name and doing promotional work for WWE. But his backstage antics continued, as he would often express disgust for a particular wrestler by shaking his head and letting out a solid "Damn!" to the roar of the crowd.

WWE released Simmons in January of 2009. Since that time, Simmons has made himself available for in-ring bookings and autograph signings throughout North America.

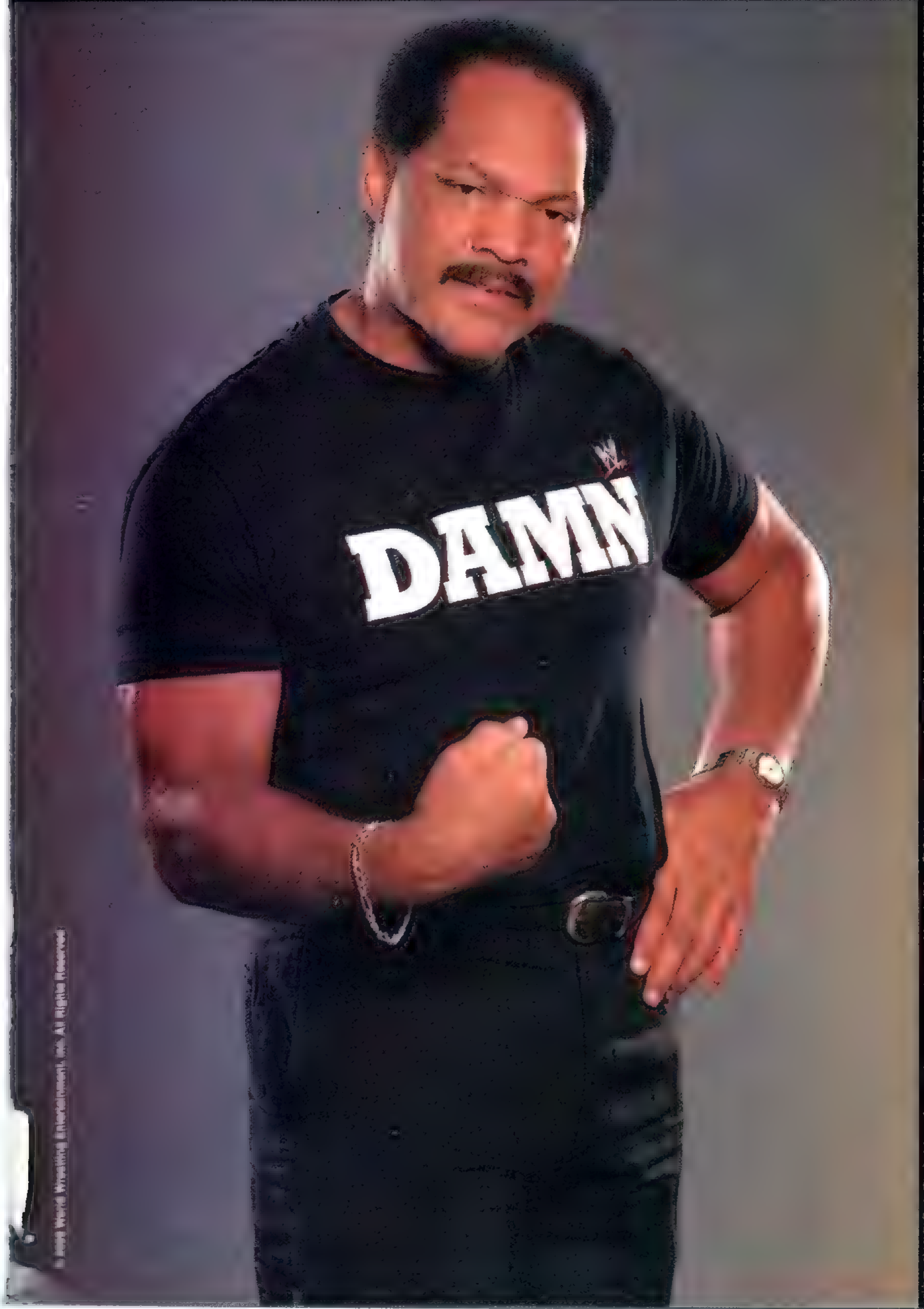
"It's easy to understand why JBL liked to hang around Simmons," said Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who interviewed the former WCW champ for 90 minutes. "The man is funny, polite, and insightful. He is very modest for someone who has accomplished so much. I think readers will find this interview both entertaining and inspirational."

Q: Your official release from WWE came in January, making you one of many people let go this year. What have you been doing with your time?

A: I've been making up for lost time with my family and enjoying every minute of that. I've started healing up and undergone some surgeries that I've been putting off for a long time. I've really had to patch myself back together. I've had a long run with football and professional wrestling, so you can imagine what my body's been through.

Q: What surgeries have you undergone since January?

A: Hip and shoulder surgeries. Also finger repair and other things that have been nagging me through the years. Some of these injuries have carried from football into wrestling, and I've been working through it. People have asked me how I walk around with so much pain. After so many years of getting my body beat up, I've managed to live with



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Q: When you made the transition from active wrestler to what we can call a "special attraction," was it any injury in particular that caused you to make that decision?

A: It just gets to the point that your overall body gets worn down. I didn't think I could give 100 percent anymore. If I couldn't do that, if I couldn't give the people everything, then I'd rather not go out there at all. As opposed to football, where I had the opportunity to heal up over periods of time, wrestling demanded a commitment every day. When I was coming up in wrestling, I had to wrestle five days a week, sometimes twice a day on weekends. The younger kids have it made these days (*laughs*). They don't know what it's

Ron Simmons was an All-American while at Florida State University (left) and even finished ninth in the Heisman trophy voting during his junior season. In 1988, just eight years after his graduation, FSU retired Simmons' number (below).

it. Now, at this point in my life, I can make time to get it repaired so I can have some normalcy.

Q: Do you feel better now?

A: I feel better, only from the relief of finally having it done. I'll never be the youthful Ron Simmons again, but at least I can feel better as I'm aging now.

Q: You had a long tenure with WWE, going back to 1996. That's a very long time. What percentage of that time have you spent on the road? And you have any long layoffs? I know you've had some injuries here and there.

A: Actually, I really didn't have any long periods of layoffs. I prided myself on making all my spots. Of course, it was hard sometimes because I was using my body every day—and it's not willing to go every day. I pushed myself because I was accustomed to working in pain in football, and that carried over into professional wrestling, so I was capable of putting up with more pain than others. That was a plus for me.

Q: Are you still willing to wrestle?

A: I do some independent shows where I'll step into the ring or do tag team matches, but nothing like I was doing in my heyday because I have to know my limits. It forces me to keep myself in some form of shape. If you stop being active completely, you tend to gain weight, which combines with your injuries over the years. If you don't keep your joints active, then it can lead to stiffening of the joints and chronic arthritis. That's why I like to stay active.



"I'm 50 years old. I've had one hell of a life, enough to fulfill a man for 100 years. It wasn't supposed to happen like that. I thank God for everything that's happened to me."

like to be on the road.

Q: Let me ask you about your college football days. That was way back in the late-'70s. The Seminoles had a good run during that time. What was it like to be involved with them during that period?

A: Before I got there along with my teammates, Florida State football was there, but unheard of on a national scale. We had to prove to the whole nation that we could stay on the football field with anyone. We might've had a couple of guys who stood out as blue-chippers, but we were mainly misfits thrown together and we managed to get it done. Even though we had successful seasons while I was at Florida State, people still thought it was a stroke of luck or a phase, and they'd be back to where they were before the time I got there. To everyone's surprise, our tradition has carried over to this day and I'm extremely proud of that.

Q: You played under Bobby Bowden, right? What was your relationship like with him?

A: When I left for Florida State, having no father and no mother, he was a father figure to me. He went beyond just being a fantastic coach to me. He took on the responsibility of giving guidance when it came to life issues and stepping in when I needed mentoring. I'm very grateful to him to this day. To be honest with you, I don't know if I'd be talking to you if it hadn't been for some of the guidance he gave me.

Q: I think it's only now that a lot of football coaches are getting credit for playing that role. Nowadays, guys like Tony Dungy and Joe Gibbs are known as much for their inspirational messages as anything else.

A: People look at the surface of football and see only the game, the finished product on TV on Saturdays and Sundays, the touchdowns, the great runs, but they don't know what all goes on inside of the game and what it means to the young men out there. It was more than a game to me. It was a way of life for me, a way to get out of my situation as a young man growing up in South Georgia. It was horrendous. When I picked up the football, it wasn't just something for me to punt, pass, and kick. It was a way of getting somewhere, out of my situa-

tion. I owe everything to the game of football.

Q: Was your attitude that this would be the first of many successes to come, or was your attitude that you'd better savor this because it might not happen again?

A: I just knew this was the opportunity of a lifetime. If I let it go by me, it wasn't going to come by again. I had to make the most of it.

Q: Tell me about your brief NFL career?

A: I had a short stint with the Browns when I came out of college. When I came out of college, I was injured and really didn't come in at full strength like I would want to. But I'm not making excuses. I was grateful to the Browns for drafting me and giving me an opportunity. From there, I had the chance to heal up and play some professional ball in Canada and for three years in the USFL.

Q: One thing I didn't know was that you played alongside Lex Luger with the Tampa Bay Bandits.

A: I played with him for three years.

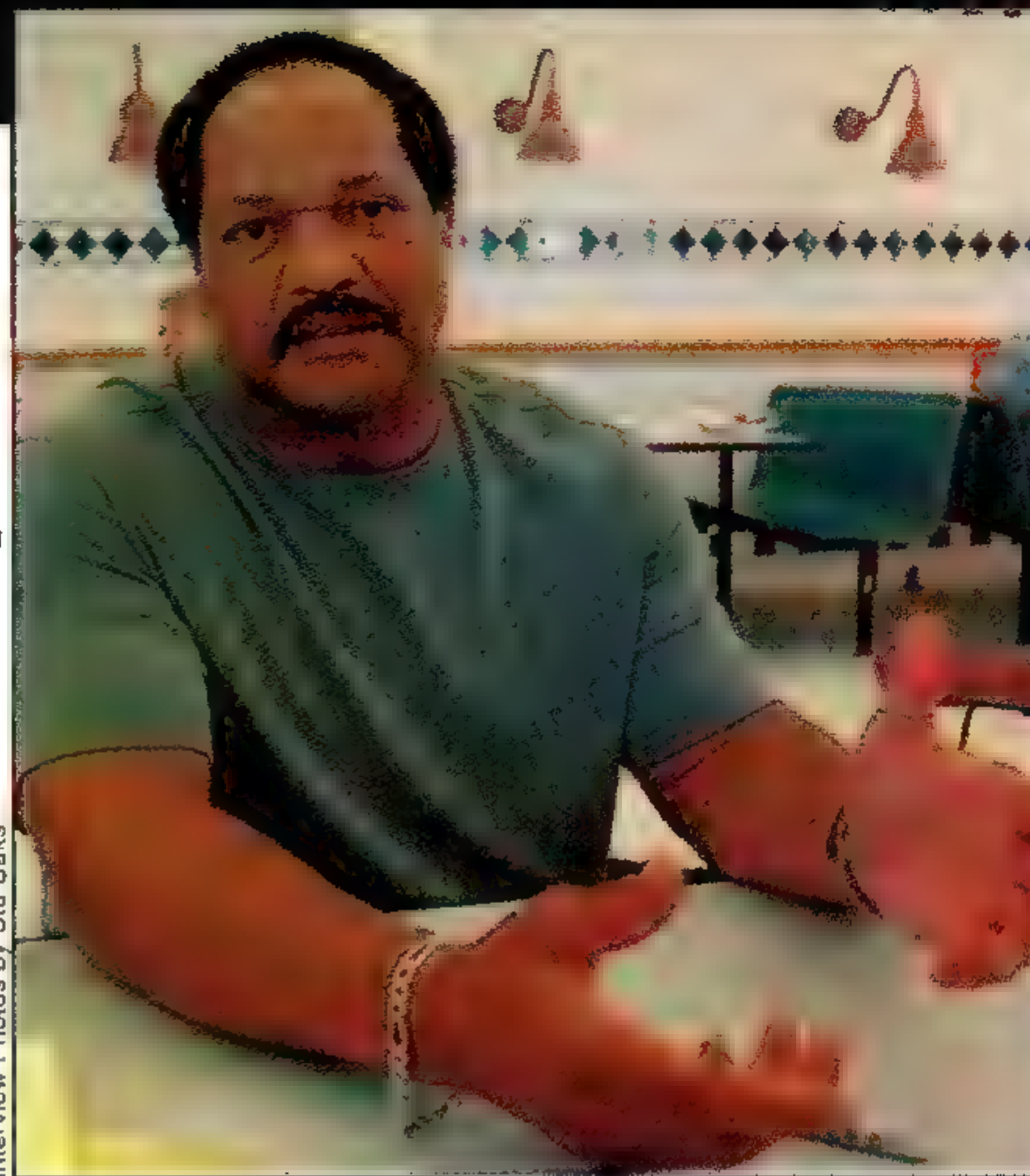
Q: Did you get to know him very well?

A: We knew each other like, well, teammates.

Q: What was the problem with the USFL? Why didn't it survive?

A: Greed on the part of businessmen. The league was going great. I was with the Tampa Bay Bandits and Steve Spurrier was head coach at the time. We were outdrawing the Buccaneers! The league had only been in business for three years, and all of a sudden, they wanted to go head-on with the NFL, and that ruined it.

Q: Florida State retired your jersey in 1988. That was eight years after you left college football. How did it feel to have your exploits remembered such a long time after you'd left the university?



Interview Photos by Stu Saks



Eight years is a long time in the college world.

A: It's a long time in the college world, but also a short time when you consider the significance and honor they bestowed upon me by retiring my jersey when I was such a young age.

Q: You were only in your 20s!

A: Which was unheard of. Believe me, I consider myself a humble person and thought, *Am I worthy of that honor? Did I make that much of a contribution?* It really is something to behold, man.

Q: I've seen the photos from the ceremony. It was such a sunny, beautiful day. What were the festivities like? What was the feel?

A: It's a feeling that you can only get by going through that kind of ceremony and honor. I couldn't take a pill or smoke anything to give me that kind of high. It's something that never really sinks in because you never dream of being honored like that. It's quite an honor when they think your contributions and your play on the field were so significant that no one else can wear your number.

Q: Switching gears a bit, your trainer for wrestling was Hiro Matsuda. He trained a lot of football players-turned-wrestlers, including Lex Luger and Paul Orndorff.

A: What a man he was. He didn't pull no punches, and, if I had it to do again, I'd do it with him—although he beat the crap out of us. But he wanted to find out if we really wanted to stay in this business or not.

Q: Do you think he felt obligated to be tough on you, thinking he had to prove wrestling was as tough as football?

A: Yeah, he wanted to find out if I really wanted to do this, or if I thought I could just wing it because I played football. But I'd been a big fan of professional wrestling for as long as I could remember. He was a very thorough trainer and a great man.



Simmons wasn't the only former football player to make the jump to pro wrestling. Paul Orndorff (above) and Lex Luger (top) also went from the gridiron to the squared circle. Luger and Simmons were even teammates in the USFL.

"I really didn't have any long periods of layoffs. I prided myself on making all my spots. Of course, it was hard sometimes because I was using my body every day—and it's not willing to go every day."



Q: So you had watched wrestling while you were growing up?

A: Yeah, man. I watched Tony Atlas, Bob Armstrong, Toru Tanaka, Junkyard Dog ... I was a big fan.

Q: Tony Atlas was huge in Georgia in the late-1970s and early-'80s.

A: You have no idea how popular. He was somebody to admire, he had a great body, and the fact that he was black just gave a kid like me another reason to like him.

Q: I remember him fighting Ivan Koloff, Alexis Smirnov, and The Mongolian Stomper during that period. But you knew whenever he was going for some sort of weightlifting record in the studio that there'd be a real problem. He'd end up with the barbell dumped on his head.

A: (Laughs.) I remember going to some of the matches at the local civic center. And then to have it come full circle and for me to get the opportunity to wrestle, that was a dream come true, too. It's just been an incredible ride.

Q: What was the most surprising thing for a football player entering this new world?

A: The most surprising thing to me was thinking, *Wrestling couldn't be tougher than football*. Was I wrong! It was far more grueling than football. I had to wrestle every day, and being away from my family took its toll. I had to be a very enduring person. It was not for the weak of mind or body.

Q: Then there was the traveling, where you had to coordinate everything yourself. It's not like the whole team was just hopping on the bus. I'm sure you had to drive yourself and be responsible for getting from place to place.

A: We were stacked and packed in the car, five or six deep. To this day, people don't realize. They see TV and the made-up glorified aspect. If someone wants to do a reality show, they should do a behind-the-scenes show about professional wrestling. I wish there could be something that gave people a better idea of what guys and girls have to go through in this business, and they'd

have a much more profound respect for it.

Q: Did you begin wrestling under your real name in Florida?

A: Yes, I did. I was the "All-American" Ron Simmons. I kept using that for the most part until I got with Vince.

Q: That had to be helpful in the beginning.

A: Yes, especially being in Florida, right?

Q: Besides Matsuda, who else was a help to you when you first got started in wrestling?

A: Bob Roop, Dusty Rhodes, Ric Flair ... all of the guys I admired were also good mentors to me. All of them were gracious enough to pass down what they learned, and I passed that down to some of the younger guys. That's the nature of this business. Man, a lot of the guys took their time and efforts to go out of their way to help me, and I'm grateful to them.

Q: That was especially important back then, because it was more like an apprenticeship than a set program.

A: Exactly right.

Q: Did Ted Turner own WCW by the time you got there?

A: Yes. The NWA was turning into WCW. Ted owned it then.

Q: Did you wrestle under your own name when you started for them?

A: Yes.

Q: Then you and Butch Reed started wearing masks as Doom.

A: We didn't go separately by our names, but everybody knew who we were.

Q: You'd been this celebrated athlete, playing in front of college football fans, and here you're

putting on a mask and being called "Doom #2." Did you have any doubts about where your career was headed?

A: The strangest thing was they put masks on us, and we were the only two black guys in the organization! That's why everybody knew who we were! But, somehow, it still managed to get over.

Q: The gimmick vastly improved after you took the masks off. You were a handsome guy and Butch Reed was already a known commodity in wrestling. So why cover your faces?

A: I think the idea was to get everybody's attention first, and not to stay as masked men from parts unknown.

Q: Butch Reed was a college football player.

A: And a very good one. He played for Central Missouri.

Q: And the Kansas City Chiefs, I believe. Did you guys have a sort of kinship because of that?

A: Yeah. He had a good football background and we talked

about it all the time. We had such great camaraderie because we had similar backgrounds and had a good feel for each other.

Q: And you probably remembered him from watching wrestling in Georgia.

A: Yeah, I did.

Q: Would you say Butch was a mentor to you in the ring? Or were you just tag team partners and that was about it?

A: No, Butch helped me a lot. He had more experience than me, so he was very helpful. The relationship was great. He was a mentor and a partner at the same time.

Q: What were the most important things you learned while you were in a tag team with him?

A: How to make the transition from



Early on, Simmons was known mostly for his tag team work. Pairing up with Butch Reed to form the masked duo known as Doom (above), he learned a great deal about the ins and outs of pro wrestling. It wasn't until the duo dropped the masks that they were able to pick up the tag titles (right).

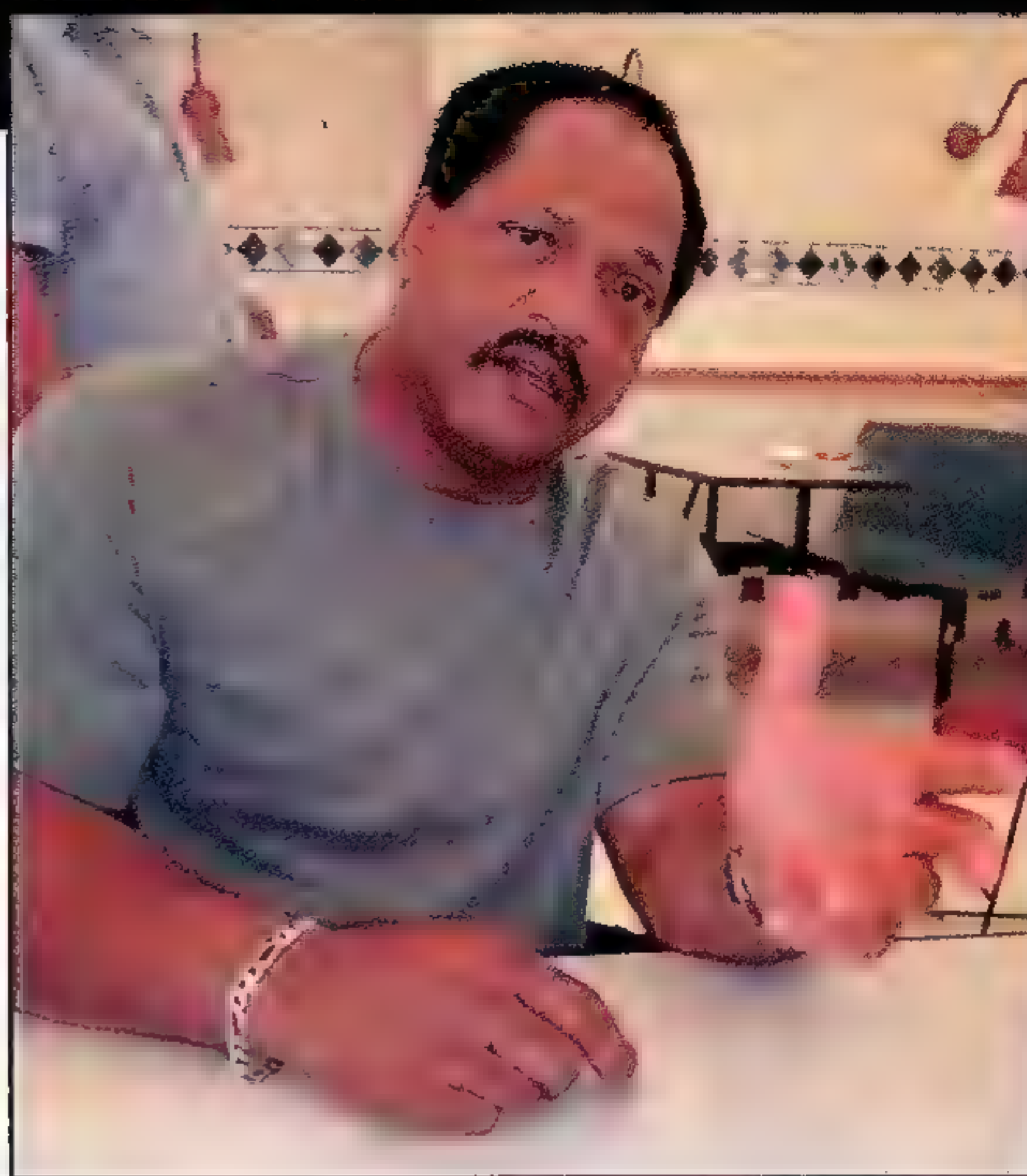


Q: Have you been able to keep in touch with him?
Do you know what he's doing now?

Q: Really?

Q: You had the storyline where you had a falling-out with Butch and that was the feud that led to you becoming a big singles star. At what point did you realize that you were being groomed for a world title reign?

Q: Who finally said they wanted you to be the WCW World champion, and who would you say



[THE WRESTLER]



On August 2, 1992, Simmons defeated Big Van Vader to become the first-ever African-American world champion in professional wrestling. To cap off the evening, Dusty Rhodes presented the belt to Simmons.

was the most responsible for coming up with that idea?

A: Bill Watts, without a doubt. And I'm grateful to him for that.

Q: Bill Watts, as you know, has gotten a bad reputation for racial comments he's made ...

A: Yeah, I'm aware of that. But the man has done some good work in the process. I'm not denying he hasn't made some comments, but he did good work, too.

Q: Maybe he's the Lyndon Johnson of wrestling. His off-handed comments give one impression, but his actions give another. Junkyard Dog was the star of his Mid-South promotion, Butch Reed was easily number two, and Ernie Ladd was the booker, one of the most powerful positions in wrestling at the time.

A: That's absolutely right. You're correct.

Q: You beat Big Van Vader for the WCW World title almost exactly 17 years ago, on August 2, 1992.

A: That's right.

Q: I will always remember that night in Baltimore. You doing the powerslam on someone as big as Vader was always impressive. It was akin to John Cena doing the Attitude Adjustment on The Big Show today.

A: When I look back even now, I get chills and goosebumps all over me and I get teary-eyed. I remem-

ber being a kid and dreaming of that kind of moment. It's very emotional for me.

Q: It wasn't on pay-per-view, but Baltimore was such a hot wrestling town. The image of Dusty coming into the ring and raising your hand was all very memorable.

A: It's an unbelievable feeling. I can't describe it.

Q: Why do you think it was important to Bill and Dusty for you to be the World champion?

A: I think they believed it was time to broaden the horizons. They wanted to open up wrestling to a whole new audience, including black people. They wanted to get rid of the stigma that only white audiences would come out in masses. That was true because black audiences—

and audiences of any other color—didn't see someone they could look up to and admire. So Bill saw this opportunity. Then again, in all fairness, why not have a black champion?

Q: It's hard to overestimate the importance of being the first black world heavyweight champion in the history of wrestling, and the modern industry goes back over 100 years. It's probably what you'll always be remembered for.

A: I'm absolutely thrilled to have been that person.

Q: I've noticed that WWE has never referred to you as the first black world heavyweight champion or a former world heavyweight champion at all. Why is that? After all, they do own WCW now.

A: I have no idea. I've noticed that myself. I don't know what the reluctance is in doing that. But it's in the record books. There's no way around it. I was ... and I am.

Q: You were kind of a throwback as champion, the All-American with legitimate athletic credentials, like Bob Backlund or Verne Gagne. I remember the WCW posters with you striking a pose with the American flag behind you. But you'd already seen champions like Ric Flair and Sting with lots of razzle-dazzle. Did you have confidence you could be a long-term champion with your tame persona?

A: From talking to people in the past and even now, at

"What a man [Hiro Matsuda] was. He didn't pull no punches, and, if I had it to do again, I'd do it with him—although he beat the crap out of us."

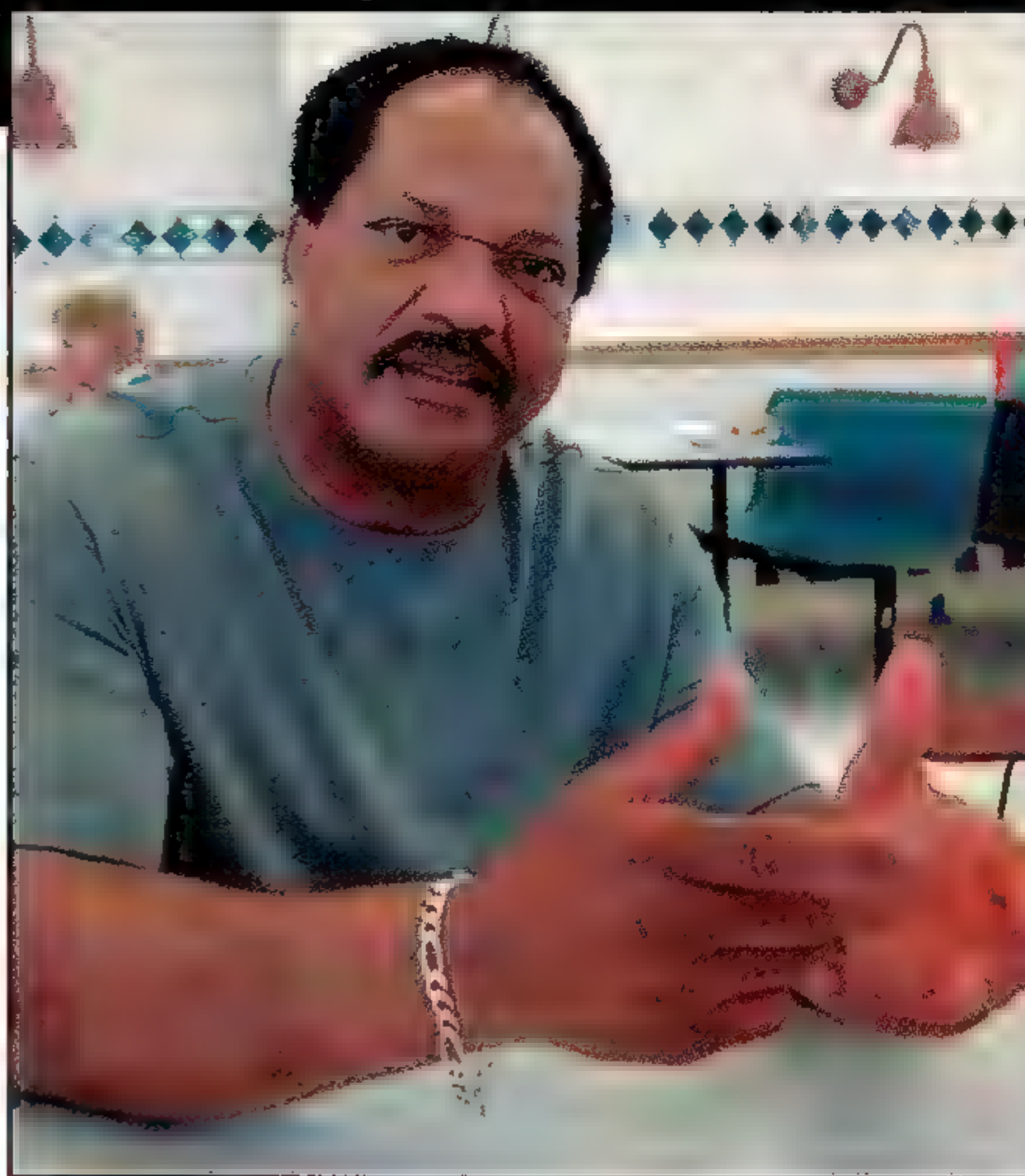
the height of my professional wrestling career, fans could believe me as an athlete and as a champion because of my background. I was more believable, as opposed to others they watch now. I'm sure when fans see some guys on TV ... it must be like, *I understand this is wrestling, but please. Please don't insult me like this.*

Q: You mean like K-Fed beating John Cena?

A: Yes. Sometimes you just have to say ... Damn!

Q: You were champion for five months, which was a long time, comparatively speaking, maybe on par with the lengths of Sting's title reigns and definitely longer than those of Rick Steamboat or Ronnie Garvin. Their reigns were only a couple of months apiece. What was your proudest accomplishment as champion?

A: Whenever I did speaking engagements with young kids. No one saw my title reign coming, and suddenly these kids could place their beliefs and hopes in me. They realized all things are possible. That



was my proudest accomplishment, to be a positive influence and prove that anything can happen.

Q: Why did you leave WCW?

A: We couldn't come to terms, like anything else, football, baseball. As time goes on, you have disagreements about money and career direction. We just didn't see eye-to-eye any longer. And, of course, getting older doesn't help.



Of all the things he has done in his career, Simmons looks back to his championship reign and remembers how great it was to be a role model for kids. He enjoyed showing the youth that anything is possible.



As champion, Simmons actually held the title longer than Sting. Though he spent nearly five months as champion and was the first black man to hold a world title, WWE has never celebrated his accomplishments.

Q: You were in ECW for a brief period. What did you think of all that raunch and cursing?

A: That had its period of time and wouldn't be around to stay. Blood and guts and hardcore and music were a fad at the time, but they weren't what pro wrestling was founded upon. It had a cult following for a while, but it definitely wasn't where wrestling was headed in the long term.

Q: Faarooq Asad. Whose idea was the gladiator gimmick?

A: I think we were both trying to come up with something, and mostly Vince was leaning toward that. I came up with the name, wanting somewhat of a radical name with a Muslim feel. The key was to

cause friction, but not step on too many toes because that could get to a point of seriousness. Faarooq [also spelled Farouk] was an ancient king and a tyrant.

Q: Sunny softened it up. I think if you'd had Slick or somebody like that, it would've been ...

A: Yeah, that would've been too hard.

Q: You know you're never going to hear the end about that helmet.

A: (Laughs.) I was teased about that damn helmet today! Somebody told me I looked like Marvin the Martian, you know, the cartoon character with Bugs Bunny.

Q: What material was the helmet made out of?

A: Thick, thick leather.

Q: If it had been a steel helmet, that would've been different.

A: It would've looked better.

Q: To a newcomer, what was it like working for the WWE, compared to WCW?

A: Night and day ... I loved it. The professionalism was great, man. I love Vince McMahon and his family, and they've been very good to me and my family. Even to this day, they are hands-down the best that I've dealt with.

Q: Didn't you suffer an injury pretty soon after



After leaving WCW, Simmons landed in ECW. Though his was a short stint, Simmons left an impression on the promotion, especially poor Mikey Whipwreck, who Ron handles with ease. While Simmons never felt the hardcore style would last for long, he does acknowledge its popularity.

"If someone wants to do a reality show, they should do a behind-the-scenes show about professional wrestling ... They'd have a much more profound respect for it."

joining the company? If so, what was that?

A: I had a deep groin pull.

Q: How long did that sideline you?

A: About two months.

Q: When you became the mouthpiece for The Nation of Domination, that was the first glimpse we had at Ron Simmons the showman. "I'm going to take my black fist to your white ass ..."

A: I tell you what ... I absolutely loved it.

Q: Did that come easy to you?

A: Oh, very much. See, most of that material no one could write for me. They had to let that character, Faarooq, talk just like he was doing. Anything written that would've come out of my mouth would've sounded as fake as you can get. They had to just let Ron Simmons be Faarooq.

Q: It's interesting that The Rock was put into The Nation of Domination so he could get the rub off of you and the strength of your promos.

A: That's because they couldn't make The Rock a star



by themselves. You're exactly right.

Q: At what point did you realize The Rock was going to become a big star?

A: I could see that in him very easily. Some guys you can just look at and see that. He was smart with good athletic ability and great charisma on TV. Once he got into a character and got the proper springboard, which came from me, he got comfortable doing it. That's what did it for him.

Q: At what point did you realize he was going to



Following his stay in ECW, Simmons moved to the WWF and became Faarooq Asad, complete with spiffy new leather hat and hot valet, Sunny.



Faarooq dropped the hat, Sunny, and the name "Asad," and picked up fellow militant wrestlers to form The Nation of Domination. The Nation would go on to produce wrestlers such as D-Lo Brown, Mark Henry, and, most famously, The Rock.

take over The Nation of Domination?

A: After I saw the way the scripts were being written. Being a veteran, I could feel what direction they wanted to go early on. You see the writing on the wall.

Q: Did you ever settle things with Ahmed Johnson?

A: Yeah, we settled it without fighting.

Q: That was one of the longest feuds ever.

A: But we settled it for real, out of the ring.

Q: So you had a legitimate problem with him?

A: You don't like everyone. We had some problems, yeah.

Q: You worked with Mark Henry, D-Lo Brown, and The Godfather.

A: I had 'em all in there, man. We were the Nation!

Q: Of that group, if I really forced you to choose, who did you like the most?

A: Now that really is tough. Each one had his own characteristics that I loved. I could get a kick out of every one of them in a different way. I swear to God to you, I honestly can't choose because I love 'em all, man! That's what really made it because the people could tell we got along great.

Q: You've had a history of taking gimmicks that seemed very limited and then transforming them into gimmicks that worked.

A: Right.



Simmons knew Dwayne Johnston was going to be a star the moment he met him, and realized his leadership role in The Nation would soon be winding down. However, he can take comfort in knowing that his feud with The Rock helped create the wrestling and film superstar's career.

A: He and I, once again, shared similar backgrounds and similar lifestyles outside the ring. So once we found out the outline of what they wanted, it was easy for us to take it from there. See, you couldn't write scripts for us. We would just go over whatever scenario they wanted us to do. All they had to do was put us in the moment and turn us loose because we could thrive off each other. You have to write for certain people, and you have to let others be themselves. My relationship with him was like my relationship with the Nation and with Butch. We got along so well that we knew how each other were going to react in different situations, so that came very easy for us.

A: Which people loved because they could relate to two crazy-ass people making fun of everyone else. You see those two guys all the time on the weekends.

A: Yeah, because people loved seeing us in that environment, screwing with people and messing with their heads. We'd also have people coming from different professions—racecar drivers, singers, whatever—and fans enjoyed it. To this day, I still get compliments about that and the Nation. Remember Kid Rock had a little midget in his group by the name of Joe C.?

A: We had him at the table, man, smoking and drinking beer with us. I got a kick out of that one even more than some of the others.

[THE WRESTLER]

A: Most of them, yes. I liked to have a good time, hanging out in bars.

Q: Were you and Bradshaw genuine friends?

A: Very good friends.

Q: You always said "Damn!" as a matter of punctuation, but when did that gimmick come about, when you would just walk into the frame, look at somebody, and let loose with "Damn!"?

A: I would usually say that when I was upset about something, even if something went wrong in the ring. So, one night in Chicago, we decided I would just go out and say it. Hell, people seemed to like it.

Q: That "Damn" T-shirt had to be some of the best merchandising you've ever done.

A: You damn right it was. I wish I'd done that 26 years earlier and never taken a bump.

Q: I thought it was really funny when you would look at somebody and pause, look as if you were going to say it, and then decide you were too disgusted and just walk away.

A: I know. Just milkin' the moment, bro.

Q: At the risk of getting too personal, is it true that you went into rehab last year?

A: Yeah, I did, and managed to get myself straight-

ened out. It was something that was needed before it got too out of hand. I'm proud to say I've been sober and I haven't had any problems.

Q: I've talked to people who've entered treatment, whether they've had an alcohol problem or drug habit, and they come out saying that it was more valuable than they expected. They not only dealt with their problem, but also got a handle on a lot of other issues.

A: It's a life's blessing. It makes you sit back and think about more than the habit you might have formed, man. It's about getting yourself in perspective and dealing with all the life issues. That's the best thing I've ever done for myself and my family.

Q: On the flip side, you were also elected to the College Football Hall of Fame last year.

A: That's right. I had just come back from the ceremony before I went into rehab.

Q: So what's your take on the highs and lows of life, if you juxtapose those two things happening in such a short amount of time?

A: I'm 50 years old. I've had one hell of a life, enough to fulfill a man for 100 years. It wasn't supposed to happen like that. I thank God for everything that's happened to me. And I'd like to



WWE viewers were treated to Simmons' fun-loving side when he partnered with Bradshaw to form The Acolytes. Simmons says the storyline came so naturally to him and Bradshaw that WWF Creative didn't need to script their antics.

"See, you couldn't write scripts for [Bradshaw and me]. We would just go over whatever scenario they wanted us to do. All they had to do was put us in the moment and turn us loose because we could thrive off each other."

thank everyone who has followed me throughout my career and given me their support. I'm grateful to them, man. They've been very nice to me, all of the fans.

Q: I can imagine you're having an even better time now because, sure, you met a lot of fans in WWE, but an indy show is a different experience with a lot of interaction.

A: It takes you back to the roots, the real fans. I do have a great time, you're right. I love it.

Q: Out of curiosity, did JBL ever give you any good stock tips?

A: Yeah, we talked all the time. He was always throwing things at me.

Q: Have any of those tips panned out for you?

A: We had a couple of them come up okay before the big crisis hit. But we managed to bail out quick.

Q: One final question: What was your immediate reaction when the bottom fell out?

A: I changed from "Damn!" and said, "Oh, s___!" □



Simmons made a great transition from full-time wrestler to full-time comedy act. For better or worse, he became known as much for saying, "Damn!" as he was for his athletic background.

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HIS M



**JOHN'S
MOJO
METER**

**John Morrison's
Plan To Sneak
To The Top**



BY LOUIE DEE

JOHN MORRISON IS the most dangerous wrestler on Smackdown.

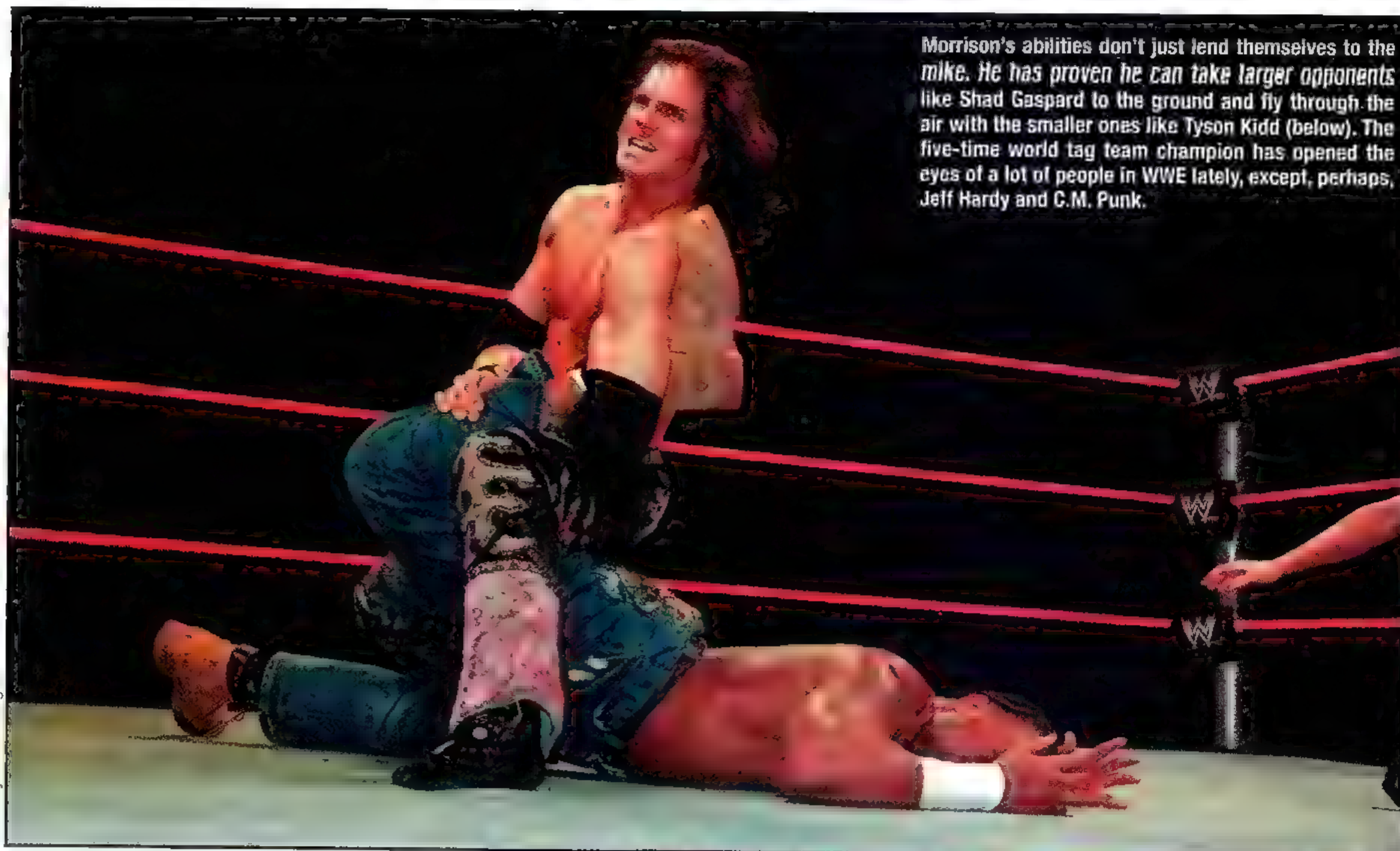
Bet you never thought anyone would say that about a man who once proclaimed himself the "Shaman Of Sexy" and shot jabs at people from the "Palace Of Wisdom," did you?

Perhaps neither did he. But there's a new John Morrison roaming the Smackdown landscape these days—and if current WWE World champion

RISING

Morrison's abilities don't just lend themselves to the mike. He has proven he can take larger opponents like Shad Gaspard to the ground and fly through the air with the smaller ones like Tyson Kidd (below). The five-time world tag team champion has opened the eyes of a lot of people in WWE lately, except, perhaps, Jeff Hardy and C.M. Punk.

Photo by Duane Long



Jeff Hardy, C.M. Punk, and the rest of the big dogs on Friday nights don't pay him proper attention, it could only be a matter of time before Morrison breaks on through and captures his first world title.

Gone is the brash, arrogant troublemaker who derided anyone and everyone on *wwe.com*'s "Dirt Sheet." Forgotten is the man who felt it was his destiny to be a star and thought that success would come easily to him. In his place is a new John Morrison, one who plans on using his talent, brains, and past experience to make a run at the WWE World championship. The "Friday Night Delight" is the most focused he's ever been, and he's on a mission to hit the top of the charts.

And he plans to do it all while keeping a low profile, letting Punk and Hardy battle it out between themselves while he waits for the opportune time to strike.

"For all of my past showboating, I've realized it won't help me get that world title," a shockingly humble Morrison told *THE WRESTLER*. "Call it youthful exuberance, call it whatever you want. I don't want to do anything that takes Punk's and Hardy's attention off each other. The longer and harder they fight each other, the easier it will be for me when I get my shot at the title."

At the top of the Smackdown pecking order, C.M. Punk and Jeff Hardy are so



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In The Cross-Hairs: Five Wrestlers Morrison Has To Watch Out For

Wrestling fans have been waiting for the return of the "Big Red Machine" since he was last seen in the ring. Now that he's back, Morrison is a force to be reckoned with. He's got the power, the speed, and the charisma to take the WWE by storm. But who are the wrestlers he has to watch out for?

DOLPH ZIGGLER: Fresh off a feud with Rey Mysterio, the "Golden Boy" might have come up a bit short, but he's established himself as somebody who must be taken seriously. In the ring, his speed and agility are his greatest assets, and Morrison's path is going to cross his very soon.

MATT HARDY: Hardy has done just about everything in his career, and he's got a world title. But since losing the ECW championship in January, he has shown that he's still got it. He's got the heart to get back to the top—especially if his brother is his final obstacle. And it wouldn't bother him if Morrison wanted to be the final obstacle.

MIKE KNOX: The "Desert Destroyer" has been fairly quiet since being drafted to Smackdown, but that doesn't mean he's any less dangerous. As Rey Mysterio found out earlier this year, one brutal beating from Knox could take Morrison out of contention in a hurry.

KANE: A former WWE and ECW champion, Kane would surely love to complete the Triple Crown. Since returning to Friday nights, the "Big Red Machine" has once again let his mean streak shine through—and as anyone in WWE can tell you, an angry Kane is a very dangerous Kane.

FINLAY: Getting traded to Smackdown may have been the best thing to happen to Finlay in years. Now that he's no longer paired with Hornswoggle, the surly veteran can once again concentrate on hurting people and chasing the biggest pot of gold in Smackdown before time runs out on him.

locked into in their own feud for the World title that they have little time or desire to notice, much less prepare for, anything else going on around them. This plays right into Morrison's plans. As he spends his time perfecting his ring style and move set, he lets Punk and Hardy wear each other down, physically and mentally. When one finally stands atop with the gold strap in hand, Morrison will be right there to claim his title shot.

Ironically, though, Morrison has drawn some attention to himself precisely because of his new, toned-down persona, if not from the Smackdown roster than at least from the fans. Ever since the end of the "bromance" between Morrison and The Miz, fans have turned toward Morrison, not away from him.

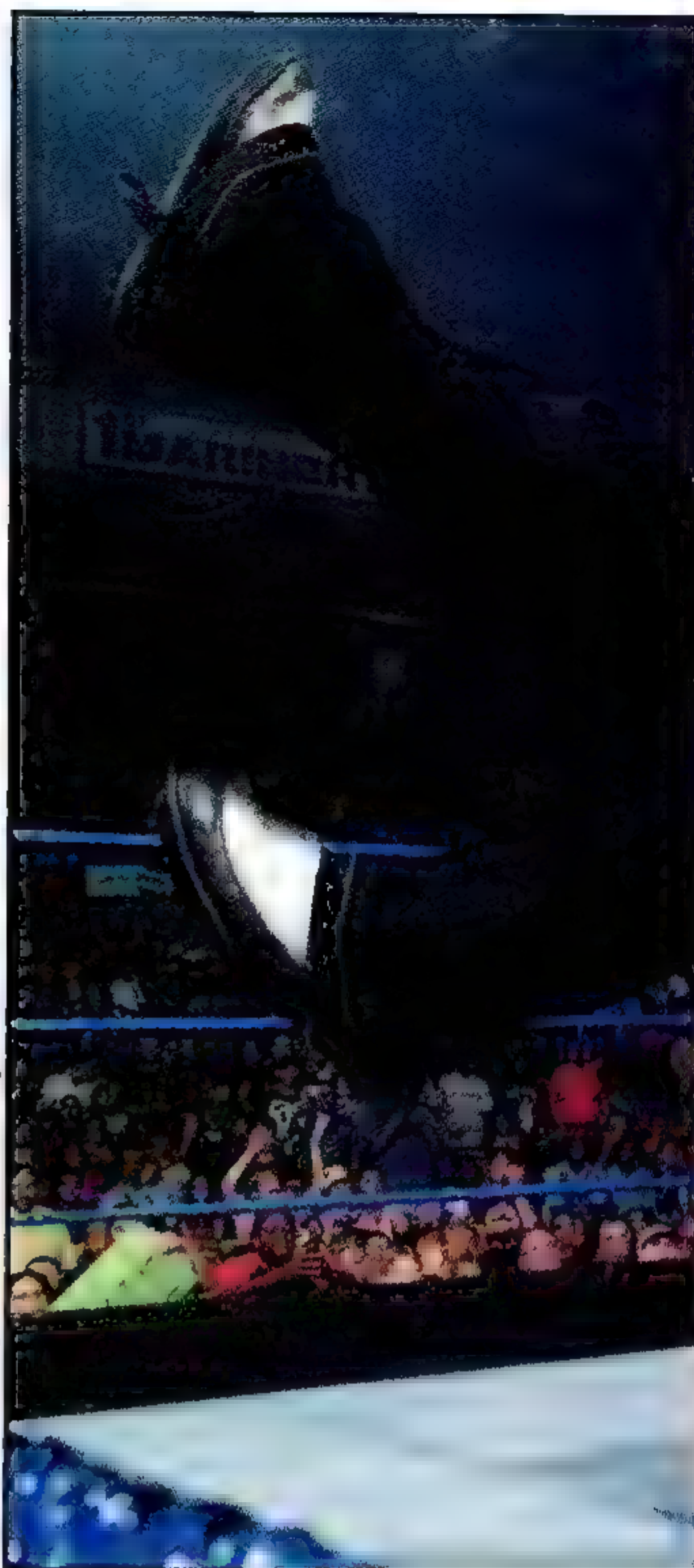


1999: Morrison's return to the WWE was a major event, and he's been a force to be reckoned with ever since. He's got the power, the speed, and the charisma to take the WWE by storm. But who are the wrestlers he has to watch out for?



At the Royal Rumble the "Shaman Of Sexy" lasted more than 19 minutes before being tossed out by Triple-H. But that wasn't before Morrison got his shots in on "The Game" and eventual winner Randy Orton.

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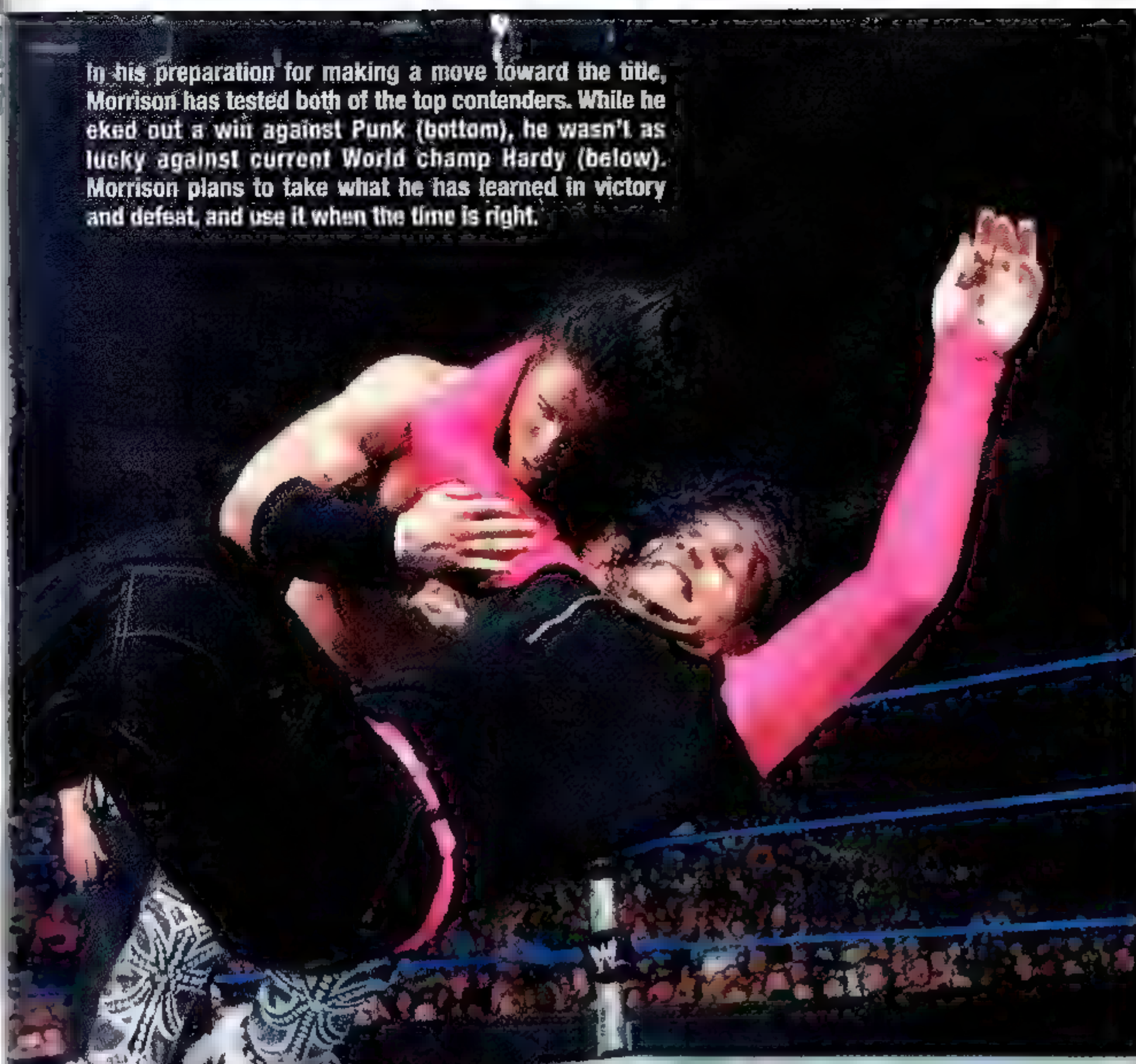


"It is nice to hear the fans' cheers, because I know I give them everything I've got every time out," Morrison said. "I appreciate their support, it's really a great way to judge what you have done. If they are cheering you, you know you're on the right path."

But if all people remember of Morrison are his antics as The Miz' partner, they're only remembering part of the picture. Not only has this young competitor proven himself in the ring, he has the hardware to show for it. His initial run as part of M-N-M brought him three reigns as WWE tag team champion, and his partnership with The Miz brought him another wave of success (another WWE tag title as well as a the World tag title reign). He also won *Tough Enough* on his own merit, plus he's a three-time Intercontinental champion, and a former ECW champion.

And how quickly Punk must have forgotten that Morrison took the ECW title

In his preparation for making a move toward the title, Morrison has tested both of the top contenders. While he eked out a win against Punk (bottom), he wasn't as lucky against current World champ Hardy (below). Morrison plans to take what he has learned in victory and defeat, and use it when the time is right.



from him. However, there's something else Punk, Hardy, and the rest mustn't forget—Morrison has improved in the ring even more since then.

The time for Morrison to strike is now because besides Punk, Smackdown is relatively bereft of other serious challengers to the top prize. Edge is sidelined due to injury, Rey Mysterio Jr. is busy defending the Intercontinental title, Chris Jericho is preoccupied with the Unified tag team championship, and The Undertaker is M.I.A.

Based on his nail-biting title match against Jeff Hardy in late-July, the champion and former champ have every reason to tune in to this burgeoning threat. Morrison just might have found the final piece of the puzzle in that match against Hardy—the knowledge that he can, in fact, hang with the best.

"That match was my first shot and I almost had him," Morrison said. "Jeff is one of the best, no doubt, and he got the better of me that night. That's why he's the champion. But I'll be champ one day, too. The lack of respect I'm getting from him and Punk right now is fine by me. They won't know what hit them when I come in and sweep the title right out from under their feet."

Jesse Ventura used to say, "Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good." But those who dismiss Morrison's current run of success as merely a case of being in the right place at the right time are playing with fire.

"I know John Morrison is a great athlete and tremendous wrestler," The Miz said in an unusual moment of candor before adding, "Why do you think I picked him to team with me?"

Although he admitted it in a backhanded way, The Miz knows what Morrison's capable of. And now that he's on his own, Morrison is starting to realize it again himself. He's always had the talent and the charisma to be one of the best. But instead of choosing to believe his own hype, Morrison now chooses to work harder to make sure that he gets to the upper echelon and stays there. □



STANDING UP TO THE MAFIA

Though he says he doesn't need any help and couldn't care less about the fans, in the end Matt Morgan is going to need your support to topple the TNA powerhouse that is the Main Event Mafia

TEXT BY MICHAEL MOORE

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

KURT ANGLE HAS learned one lesson well from some of pro wrestling's most notorious villains: Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer. Earlier this year, Morgan made it known that his goal was to join the Main Event Mafia, an elite group of former world champions. Ever since then, Angle has done everything he can to keep the Mafia on Morgan's good side.

*Why Matt Morgan
Must Have Your Support!*



At times, Angle has had to play peacekeeper, as Morgan has come to blows with Mafia members such as Scott Steiner and Booker T. But Angle is well aware of the threat Morgan poses, and will do everything he can to make sure the angry giant is by his side, and not in his face.

"Angle's toying with Morgan," said Sting, who competed against both men in the main event of TNA's Hard Justice pay-per-view. "Kurt has no intention of letting Matt join the Mafia, but he realizes Matt poses a bigger threat to him than anyone else."

Throughout history, the leaders of some of wrestling's most infamous rule-breaking factions have done the same thing Angle is doing now. Triple-H real-

ized early on that Batista and Randy Orton were the two biggest threats to his top spot, so he rallied them to his side and formed Evolution.

And Angle has undoubtedly studied the history of Ric Flair, who protected his NWA World title over the years by surrounding himself with the men who were most likely to take it from him. Throughout his career, Flair was able to lure men like Lex Luger, Barry Windham, and Sid Vicious into The Four Horsemen, and he kept them from targeting his title.

In 1986, a very green Luger arrived in the NWA and quite confidently stated that he would become a Horseman. By early-1987, Flair and company welcomed him into the group.

It all began with a handshake (above). After Matt Morgan had claimed victory to earn his spot as the final main in the main event for Hard Justice, everyone, including Kurt Angle, assumed he would roll over for a spot in the Main Event Mafia. When that didn't happen (below), a light of hope shined in that maybe Morgan could be the one to lead the fight against the MEM.



"I understand exactly what Matt Morgan's thinking," Luger said. "He sees the money, the fame, the lifestyle, and he wants that; he's young and hungry. But he doesn't see that Angle's using him."

But it is because of these great temptations being laid at Morgan's feet that you, the fans, must stand up behind him and show your support. Without you, this could turn into yet another great wrestler who has fallen at the wayside of the MEM because they became enamored with the possibilities of fame.

Even Angle realizes that no man in TNA is more equipped to dismantle the Mafia than Morgan. "The Blueprint" has what it takes to succeed where so many have failed—and it's time for TNA fans to rally to his side.

At 7' and 305 pounds, he has the size and strength to go toe-to-toe with any member of the Mafia. He's also not the typical big man; Morgan has very unusual quickness and agility for a man his size, and can scale the ropes and take to the air like few super heavyweights in the sport's history.

But most importantly, Morgan has the vicious, nasty demeanor that will be necessary to take out the Mafia. In fact, it's Morgan's attitude that likely has kept the fans from embracing him.

Some Encouraging Words From DDP

When I stepped up to the NWO, it wasn't because I was looking to make a change in WCW. I wasn't trying to be

a savior or start some kind of crusade or something. I just knew it wasn't the spot for me, catch my drift?

So listen up, Matt Morgan. I know what you are going through: Don't want the fans on your side. Don't need the fans on your side. That's laughable, brother.

I was like you. Thought I could do it on my own. But you can't. You need the fans' support and you need it in a bad way. Without them you got nothin'. It took me a while to realize it, but the moment I did, all I wanted to do was jump out in the stands and be with the people. It changed my

whole idea of what the fans were there for. After that there was no turning back. I was standing my ground, even if it meant that I go it alone. But the thing was, I wasn't alone. I had the fans right there.

That is what you are missing out on, Matt. Take the time and realize that you can feed off of them just as they feed off of you. It won't take much and you'll be a hell of a lot better wrestler for it.

After you take that first step toward them, fans will come with you for the entire ride. And oh what a ride it'll be! I started something that turned out bigger than I ever expected, the end of the NWO. Now you have a chance to start the end of the MEM. Take a step back and realize that this is much bigger than you. Don't do it for yourself. Do it for the fans you think you don't need.

You'll be a better person in the end, brother.



Photo by Diane Douglas



"The Blueprint" has proven more than once he will do whatever it takes to win. Just look in his eyes after he beat Abyss in a 10,000 Thumbtack match. He almost seems to enjoy pummeling his foes as much as he does winning.

"The Blueprint" has never been seen as a fan favorite because of his harsh comments and gigantic ego. And maybe that is why he feels so put off by the fans.

"I won't even pretend that I'm a babyface in real life, because I'm not," Morgan told *The Baltimore Sun* in a recent interview. "I am a [jerk]. I admit it wholeheartedly. I'm as cocky as they come."

Though he may not come across as

the most likeable guy, the fans need to realize that Morgan represents their best chance to get ride of the MEM. By showing support for the monstrous man from Fairfield, Connecticut, they will give him the motivation he needs to break through the glamour and glitz that comes with being a Mafia member.

As much as any fan of the sport might not want to admit it, Morgan's arrogant

and vile attitude might be just what is needed to fight off the Mafia's reign of terror. To this point, men like A.J. Styles, Sting, Jeff Jarrett, and others have failed. They've battled for respect, or the pride of TNA, and haven't been willing to stoop to the Mafia's level. But a man like Matt Morgan would have no problem taking whatever steps must be taken to ensure his victory.

Just look back on his feud with Abyss. Morgan, known more for his raw power and natural athletic ability, faced off in some of TNA's most grueling and horrifying matches just so he could claim victory over his former tag team partner. It is precisely that kind of dedication to winning that is needed to finally upend the Mafia, and the fans need to realize this.

True, Morgan's had his shot at the TNA World title, and Angle outsmarted him. But now "The Blueprint" has just another reason to really focus and set his sights

Morgan's raw strength is unquestionable. Though he is a high flyer, A.J. Styles is no sack of potatoes. At 215 pounds, Styles just couldn't handle the giant.



on the taking down a group he once so badly wanted to be a part of. And Angle knows this. He will surely start throwing all the firepower at his command toward the former college basketball standout.

But there isn't anyone in the Mafia who can measure up to Morgan. He has Kevin Nash's size and power, with speed and a rage that Nash never had. He can out-muscle Steiner and Booker T. Even Samoa Joe, who physically matches up well with Morgan, seems too caught up in his own character to really pose much of a threat.

Ultimately, the numbers game could catch up to Morgan, and that's where the fans will have to show their support. Though Morgan may profess indifference—or even dislike—for the TNA fans, he will undoubtedly need your help. Many have tried and proven that just one person cannot defeat the MEM for good.

Morgan isn't looking to be TNA's savior, but in the long run, he could turn out to be



With his power, size, and speed, there is no one person in the MEM who can stand up to Morgan. (Consequences Creed will attest to that.) If the fans will back him, Morgan could be the one piece that has been missing in the downfall of the Main Event Mafia.

just that. TNA fans must rally to Morgan's side and realize, while he may not cater to them or be a typical fan favorite, the destruction of the Mafia could start with him.

"I don't give a damn what people think about me," Morgan snarled. "If they wanna cheer me, that's their business, not mine. If they wanna boo me, I really don't care. All I care about is what's best for Matt Morgan."

And what's best for Matt Morgan may ultimately be what's best for TNA. □





Derek Sanders takes one for the team, playing the part of Blue Demon Jr. and absorbing this punishment from Oliver John. Unfortunately for The Border Patrol, their scheme was sniffed out and the real NWA belt did not change hands.

GOING THROUGH

HELL

HOW MUCH MORE CAN **BLUE DEMON JR.** TAKE?

BY AL ALVEN

PHOTOS BY JEREMY MAURER & SHANE M. KIDDER/NWA

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE heavyweight champion Blue Demon Jr. has become accustomed to fighting multi-front wars. Challenges come from all angles and directions—and from different types of foes—when you hold the title that many around the world still consider to be one of the riches prizes in the sport.

On average, since defeating Adam Pearce for the famous “Ten Pounds Of



Former NWA champion Adam Pearce discusses his options for a guaranteed shot with NWA executive David Marquez. Pearce is just the sort of guy to pull and Edge or Punk and challenge Demon when he's down and out.

Gold" in October of 2008, Demon has defended the belt four to five nights a week.

There have also been stretches where he has literally gone weeks without a day off. Harkening back to the glory days of the NWA, the 43-year-old second-generation star has fulfilled his promise to be a true fighting champion, traveling around the globe to meet all comers.

With such a hectic schedule, one would have to think that something would eventually give, that Demon can't keep this up forever. In fact, some are banking on it.

"I worry sometimes that he is taking on too much, but he knows no other way," explained Super Crazy, a friend and frequent challenger of Demon. "There are some nights where he looks as unbeatable as ever. But other nights, he looks worn down and vulnerable."

"My biggest fear for him is that Adam Pearce or Oliver John will catch him on one of those nights. And that would be the worst thing that could happen to the NWA title, for it to fall into one of their hands."

Pearce and John represent the two most active threats to Demon's reign. They are also the most persistent thorns in his side, cunning adversaries who have managed to strike an emotional nerve with the honorable champion in different ways.

The hatred between Demon and Pearce goes back to Demon's title win,



John would have a reason to be smiling had he legitimately beaten Blue Demon for the NWA belt. Not only was his victory bogus, but so was the belt itself. The NWA used the red strap only briefly. The only belt that matters is the one draped over Demon's shoulder on page 60.

which was scored with a pinfall while Pearce's hand was under the bottom rope. Ever since NWA officials made the decision to uphold the outcome, Pearce has complained to anyone that will listen that he never lost the title.

"I will take back what is rightfully mine," said Pearce. "How long can this guy hide behind the NWA and its biased

rulings? How long can they continue to deny me of my rightful place? I never lost the belt. As far as I'm concerned, I remain the rightful champion!"

"Scrapdaddy" has come as close as anyone to unseating Demon in multiple chances but has fallen short. Still, he has positioned himself as a perennial top contender. What makes

him particularly dangerous now is his possession of a trump card that allows him to challenge for the NWA title at any time. Similar in concept to WWE's money in the bank stipulation, Pearce earned the opportunity by defeating another former NWA champion, Brent Albright, earlier this year.

With the trump card as a buffer, "Scrap Iron" has become so bold that he recently declined a scheduled title shot in Tyler, Texas, claiming that Demon would have an unfair "hometown" advantage in the Southwest, where he is wildly popular.

While he is being secretive about his plans, speculation is that Pearce will wait to challenge Demon, perhaps after the champion is worn down from another defense, somewhere in the Midwest.

"He never wants to fight me like a man, face-to-face," said Demon, fuming at the mention of Pearce's name. "He always takes shortcuts, but he will never beat me that way. Every time he's had the chance, he has run or had his friends help him. I've always been a man, and I'm not afraid to fight him anytime, anywhere."

Meanwhile, Oliver John has

come out of nowhere to become a credible threat to Demon's title, goading the champion by insulting his Mexican culture and heritage. One half of the "Border Patrol" tag team with Derek Sanders in the Southwest, John has made a habit of infuriating

predominantly Latino audiences with his controversial political views.

But John has proven to be much more than a mouth. After failing to unseat Demon initially, he concocted an underhanded plan that nearly netted him the NWA title. At an event in King

Pearce has kept himself busy with his booking duties in Ring of Honor and against top-level opponents like T.J. Perkins, while he bides his time in anticipation of his NWA title shot.



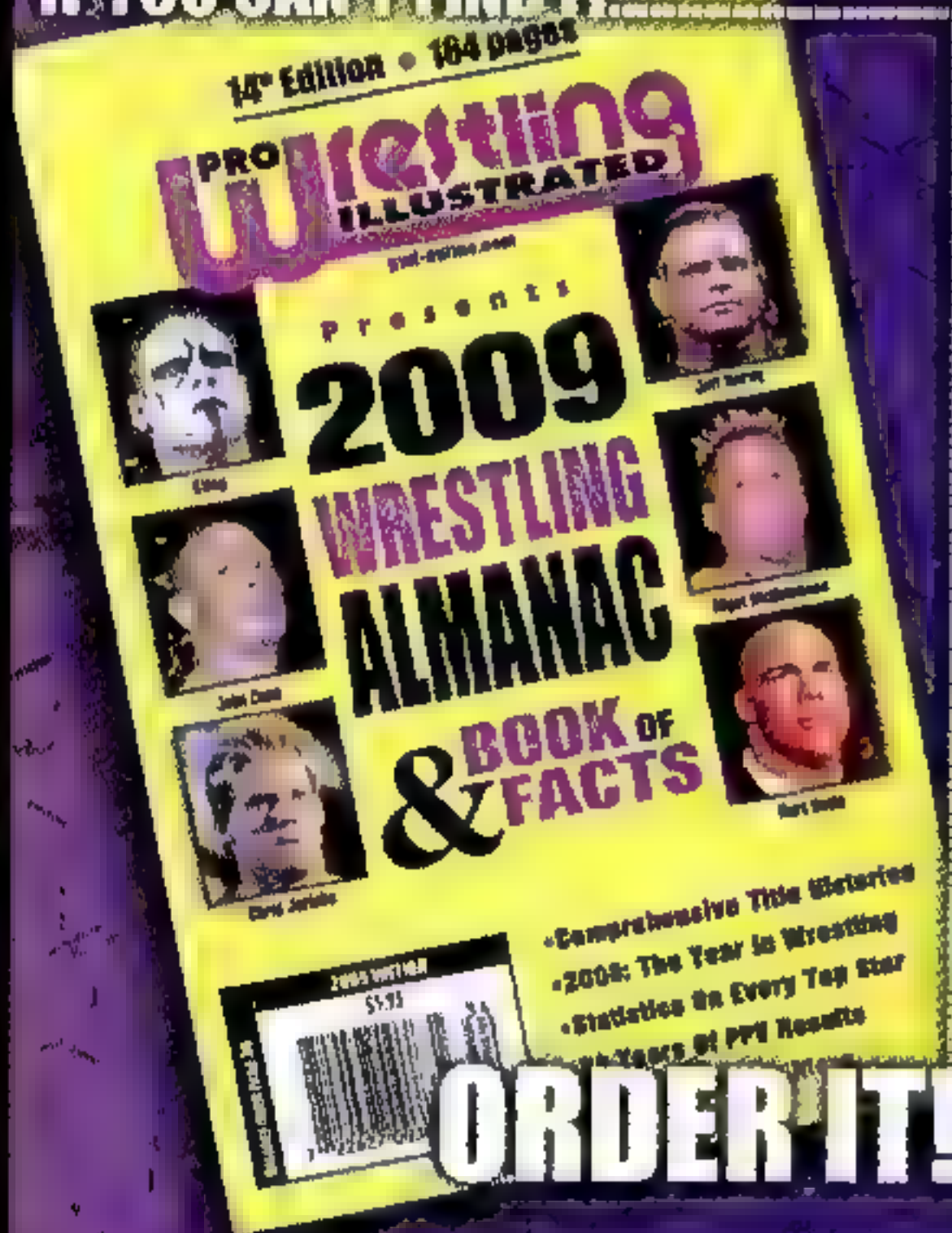
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City, Texas, John pinned Sanders, who was dressed as Demon and carried with him a replica of the trademark championship belt.

This underscored one of the pitfalls of the NWA's decision to wave

the rule that previously prohibited masked men from holding its top title. Fortunately for the real Demon, he had been in possession of a special red leather-backed belt that is being used in celebration of the NWA's

BLUE DEMON JR.: A TRUE SURVIVOR

While supporters such as Super Crazy may fret over Demon's durability as the NWA champion, fans and Mexican citizens might recall a much more ominous battle he raged against the deadliest of foes: cancer.

In late-2003, Demon was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer of the throat. Through the remainder of 2003 and the early part of 2004, Demon underwent grueling radiation treatments. But despite the strength-sapping therapy, Demon honored all of his wrestling commitments. He never missed a date and never complained about his illness.

"It was not an easy period in my life," Demon said, "but the encouragement I received from the boys in the locker room and especially from the fans kept me going."

Such fortitude and courage proved the luchadore's almost super-human devotion to his profession and his fans.

Today, Demon's cancer is in remission. And while his mask hides some of the radiation's cosmetic effects, he remains as sharp as ever on the mat and in the air.

Aside from holding the NWA championship, Demon also sits on the

board of directors at the Gerald Alfredo Association for Informing Mexicans of Lymphatic Cancers. He is also a spokesperson for the organization.

"People have to be educated about the dangers of cancer," he said. "Early diagnosis saved my life and can save so many more."

If Blue Demon Jr. can survive the physical and emotional ravages of lymphatic cancer, overcoming the antics of Oliver John and Adam Pearce should prove much less daunting, but no less rewarding.

—Frank Krewda



Blue Demon: The epitome of courage and determination

50th anniversary. John's win was subsequently voided, but not before he made a big impression on the champion.

"Oliver John is a coward, like Pearce," said Demon. "He is a good wrestler, I will give him credit. But he has no honor and no morals. When he insults my people, it makes my blood boil and makes me want to beat him even more. He is an annoying pest."

John has come close to beating Demon in several actual encounters between the two since then. Most notable was a three-way match in Phoenix that also included Super Crazy. Like Pearce, Crazy feels that it is only a matter of time before the title falls to him. Meanwhile, many observers speculate that Pearce is sitting back, playing Demon and John against each other from afar, in hopes that John will wear Demon down for him.

"Listen, with all due respect to Adam Pearce, I'm the one who has Blue Demon Jr.'s number," said John. "Every time we meet, I learn more about him. I'm getting closer and closer to becoming NWA champion. I can feel it. And after I beat him, I'm gonna deport that masked fool back to Mexico for good and rub the title in the faces of all of his fans!"

So now everyone waits. While the challenges from John and others will



John is a formidable challenger with a variety of offensive weapons at his disposal. He has been very offensive to Demon and his Mexican countrymen with his views on immigration.

continue to come, no one can say for sure how the NWA title situation will turn out until Pearce finally decides to cash in.

When, where, and under what circumstances it will happen is anyone's guess.

"Demon is going to have to stay

sharp and have eyes in the back of his head," warned Super Crazy. "I just hope that he's ready, but he will always say that he is. I don't think he will ever crack, but he is under so much pressure. He's almost a deity in Mexico, but in the ring he is only human."

THE WRESTLING ANALYST

Years Pro: 21
Size: 5'9", 205
"PWI 500" Listings: 2009—40
 2008—117
 2007—139
 2006, 2005—not listed
 2004—113
 2003—29
 2002—45
 2001—49
 2000—54
 1999—49
 1998—114
 1997, 1996, 1995—Not listed
 1994—274
 1993—181
 1992—402
 1991—392

Titles: All American Wrestling heavyweight
 Anarchy Championship Wrestling Texas heavyweight
 ACW-IWA Texas tag team
 Continental Wrestling Association heavyweight
 ECW World
 Gateway Championship Wrestling heavyweight
 Global Wrestling Federation Light heavyweight
 Hardcore Wrestling Association heavyweight (2 times)
 Independent Wrestling Association East Coast heavyweight
 Independent Wrestling Association Mid-South heavyweight
 New Era Pro Wrestling Triple Crown
 New Wrestling Society heavyweight
 New York Wrestling Connection heavyweight
 NYWC Interstate
 Pro Wrestling America heavyweight
 PWA light heavyweight (3 times)
 PWA tag team
 ROH heavyweight
 Showtime Allstar Wrestling International
 NWA tag team (2 times)
 TNA X division (2 times)
 United Wrestling Association heavyweight
 United States Wrestling Organization TV
 World Wrestling All-Stars International cruiserweight
 WWF light heavyweight

PWI Awards: Most Improved Wrestler of the Year (1999)

JERRY LYNN



Photo by Joe Zanolle

THE NUMBERS

Offense (8.5): Jerry Lynn is like the scrappy, fearless terrier at the dog park. He's dwarfed by practically all of his peers, he's drastically outnumbered, and yet he has clearly established himself as a leader of the pack. What he lacks in size and strength he more than makes up for in his arsenal of moves, submission holds, aerial tactics and the occasional hardcore assault. He has been known to unleash three different types of piledrivers in a single match, so it's no wonder he has left such a trail of vanquished, battered opponents in his wake.

Defense (9.0): A competitor doesn't last as long in the wrestling business as Jerry Lynn has without knowing how to save his own butt. Nearly always outsized by his opponents, Lynn must frequently take evasive action in the ring. He is a master at grabbing the pendulum of momentum in any match and swinging it back in his favor. If Lynn's opponent knows 500 holds, Lynn knows 501 reversals. Watch carefully next time you see Lynn in a seemingly hopeless situation; 50 bucks says he'll somehow turn the tide.

Experience (10.0): A true journeyman of pro wrestling, Lynn is one of only a handful of competitors to last—and continue to thrive—after more than two decades in the business. He has wrestled in dozens of countries around the world in every major promotion of the past 20 years. Perhaps no other active wrestler on earth is a better example of the adage that practice makes perfect. Lynn is arguably wrestling better now, at age 46, than he has at any other point in his career. He likely only has a few years left to perform at such a high level. He already bears many striking similarities to Randy "The Ram" Robinson, Mickey Rourke's tragic anti-hero in *The Wrestler*; we sincerely hope Lynn will think of his own health and family when he transitions into a well-deserved retirement.

Conditioning (9.0): Despite his relatively small stature and somewhat advanced age, Lynn is in remarkable physical condition. His frame is packed with enough muscle to allow him to perform strength-based moves, yet his quickness and agility help him dictate the style and pace of a match. Anyone who has watched the tapes of Lynn's matches with such similarly built opponents as Justin Credible or Rob Van Dam has seen how athletically gifted he is.

Science (9.0): The mark of a truly great wrestler is his ability to adapt to any type of match. Over his two-

decade career, Lynn has faced giants, monsters, technicians, high-flyers, and brawlers. He won some of those matches, lost others, but always brought out the best in his opponents by bringing the best out in himself. Lynn can wrestle an hour-long "broadway" full of complex moves and near-falls just as readily as he can swing chairs and smash tables in a hardcore melee.

Stamina (9.0): Lynn never backs down, never loses focus, and certainly never gives anything less than 100 percent. His epic clashes in ECW against Rob Van Dam demonstrated that Lynn could go the distance against any foe. Whether he can keep up such a pace much longer is uncertain, though his recent work in Ring of Honor bears no evidence of fatigue.

Power (7.5): Though Lynn is enviably muscular by most standards, pro wrestling is a world of giants who dwarf the 5'9", 205-pounder. But while he may not be considered a powerhouse, Lynn is strong enough to do what he needs to do, and that's what matters. He's strong enough to perform the moves in his repertoire, including his devastating cradle piledriver.

Speed (8.5): While he may not move at the lightning speed of the lucha-inspired acrobats of contemporary wrestling, Lynn has the agility and dexterity to keep pace with practically anyone. What's more, he can disorient his bulkier opponents by constantly staying one step ahead of them. With lightning reflexes he can unleash a snap-DDT or short-clothesline before his opponent knows what's coming.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (8.5): Sure, many of his peers in ECW exhibited higher pain thresholds, but Lynn doesn't need to get entangled in barbed wire to prove he's tough. All of Lynn's matches are fast-paced, hard-hitting affairs that typically leave both Lynn and his opponent exhausted. Lynn proves that you don't have to bleed to be hardcore.

Quality Of Opposition (9.5): Lynn has wrestled in ECW, WCW, WWE, ROH, and dozens of independent promotions. His early battles with The Lightning Kid raised the bar for fast-paced, cruiserweight-style wrestling in America. His epic ECW showdowns with Lance Storm and Rob Van Dam remain etched in the mind of every fan that had the pleasure of seeing them. But it was in ECW where he battled some of the best talents in wrestling: Eddie Guerrero, Chris Jericho, Chris Benoit, Dean Malenko, and more. If that's not quality opposition, nothing is.



1


With a wide range of moves at his disposal, Lynn has brought down many larger foes. His cradle piledriver is still one of the most devastating moves in the sport.



Defense is perhaps Lynn's strongest suit. Here against Al Snow, he escapes a side headlock and gets in position to deliver an offensive maneuver of his own. ②



③ Although he excels in more-technical matches, Lynn proved against Ron Killings in TNA that he isn't afraid to bleed to get a win.



④ At 46 years old, few people would expect Lynn to keep pace against younger opponents such as Bryan Danielson. However, the former ROH champion's physical fitness and dedication to training have kept him in the thick of the title chase.

⑤ Lynn is far from being a powerhouse, but he gets the most from his impressive musculature. Lynn's agility and experience compensate for his lean frame and allow him to execute many maneuvers.


[THE ANALYSIS]

Repertoire: Lynn relies on a devastating mix of physical weaponry, from Greco-Roman mat wrestling to aerial assaults to wild brawling. His biggest strength isn't simply his own arsenal of holds and moves, though—it's his ability to escape from and reverse any opponent's offense. Lynn's signature moves, such as his cradle piledriver, are certainly devastating, but such moves are only possible after wearing his opponents down during expertly wrestled matches.

Strengths: While some wrestlers succeed thanks to a predominant attribute—size, power, speed, pain threshold—Lynn's ring prowess is based on a combination of them. He's strong but not bulky; quick but not a lightweight; sportsmanlike but not afraid to get violent. The reason he has lasted as long as he has in a business as brutal as wrestling is thanks to his ability to adapt to any situation.

Weaknesses: Away from the ring, Jerry Lynn is a mild-mannered, soft-spoken gentleman. Inside the ring, well, he's pretty much the same. Lynn has always lacked a certain killer instinct. He is so rational in the ring, so even-keeled, one wonders if a little rage might do him some good. Perhaps his years of experience have taught him to keep a cool head in the ring. Everyone mellows with age, but Lynn might benefit by getting in touch with his darker, meaner side.

Future: Now that he's just a few years away from the big five-oh, Lynn should be thinking seriously about how and when he wants to end his long and illustrious wrestling career. Sure, he never wrestled Hulk Hogan in the main event at Madison Square Garden, but in many ways he achieved something better. He earned the deep respect of his peers and of fans for



more than two decades of thrilling, technically brilliant wrestling. The wrestling world needs a mind as sharp and knowledgeable as his behind the scenes. But until the day he hangs up the boots, we will continue to cheer for him and continue to be amazed by him. □

OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 C.M. PUNK**
222, Chicago, IL
(2) WWE World champion
- 2 RANDY ORTON**
245, St. Louis, MO
(1) WWE heavyweight champion
- 3 KURT ANGLE**
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(3) TNA World champion
- 4 CHRISTIAN**
235, Toronto, Ontario
(-) ECW champion
- 5 AUSTIN ARIES**
202, Milwaukee, WI
(7) Ring of Honor champion
- 6 BLUE DEMON JR.**
228, Mexico City, Mexico
(5) NWA champion
- 7 YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**
280, Tokyo, Japan
(-) AJPW Triple Crown champion
- 8 JEFF HARDY**
225, Cameron, NC
(8) No. 1 contender WWE World title
- 9 JOHN CENA**
240, West Newbury, MA
(10) No. 1 contender WWE heavyweight title
- 10 MATT MORGAN**
330, Fairfield, CT
(-) No. 1 contender TNA World title



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Matt Morgan

TAG TEAMS

- 1 CHRIS JERICO & THE BIG SHOW**
Combined weight: 667 pounds
(-) WWE Unified tag team champions
- 2 SCOTT STEINER & BOOKER T**
Combined weight: 532 pounds
(-) TNA World tag team champions
- 3 SHAD GASPARD & JTG**
Combined weight: 530 pounds
(-) No. 1 contender WWE Unified tag title
- 4 TED DIBLASE JR. & CODY RHODES**
Combined weight: 454 pounds
(3) No. 2 contenders: WWE Unified tag title
- 5 DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS**
Combined weight: 395 pounds
(7) ROH tag team champions
- 6 RODERICK STRONG & ERICK STEVENS**
Combined weight: 447 pounds
(8) FIP tag team champions
- 7 RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER**
Combined weight: 560 pounds
(6) NWA tag team champions
- 8 BO & DUKE ROTUNDO**
Combined weight: 536 pounds
(-) FCW tag team champions
- 9 BRUTUS MAGNUS & DOUG WILLIAMS**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(-) IWGP tag team champions
- 10 BROTHER DEVON & BROTHER RAY**
Combined weight: 560 pounds
(4) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

RAW

WWE Champion:

RANDY ORTON

(C) 245, St. Louis, MO

- 1—JOHN CENA**
(2) 240, West Newbury, MA
- 2—TRIPLE-H**
(1) 255, Greenwich, CT
- 3—KOFI KINGSTON**
(-) 218, Jamaica
- 4—M.V.P.**
(-) 249, Miami, FL
- 5—JACK SWAGGER**
(-) 285, Perry, OK
- 6—THE MIZ**
(6) 231, Cleveland, OH
- 7—EVAN BOURNE**
(-) 183, St. Louis, MO
- 8—SHAWN MICHAELS**
(5) 225, San Antonio, TX
- 9—TED DIBLASE JR.**
(-) 235, Palm Springs, FL
- 10—MATT HARDY**
(-) 213, Cameron, NC

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:

C.M. PUNK

(C) 222, Chicago, IL

- 1—JEFF HARDY**
(1) 225, Cameron, NC
- 2—THE UNDERTAKER**
(-) 299, Death Valley, CA
- 3—REY MYSTERIO JR.**
(4) 175, San Diego, CA
- 4—JOHN MORRISON**
(5) 219, Los Angeles, CA
- 5—CHRIS JERICO**
(3) 226, Manhasset, NY
- 6—DOLPH ZIGGLER**
(6) 221, Hollywood, CA
- 7—FINLAY**
(-) 233, Belfast, N. Ireland
- 8—R-TRUTH**
(8) 228, Charlotte, NC
- 9—DAVID HART SMITH**
(-) 260, Calgary, Alberta
- 10—KANE**
(-) 323, Hell

ECW

Champion:

CHRISTIAN

(1) 235, Toronto, Ontario

- 1—WILLIAM REGAL**
(-) 240, Blackpool, England
- 2—VLADIMIR KOZLOV**
(7) 302, Moscow, Russia
- 3—EZEKIEL JACKSON**
(-) 285, Harlem, NY
- 4—TOMMY DREAMER**
(C) 265, Yonkers, NY
- 5—SHEAMUS**
(-) 280, Dublin, Ireland
- 6—SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(-) 248, Orangeburg, SC
- 7—TYLER REKS**
(-) 252, Laguna Beach, CA
- 8—ZACK RDER**
(10) 214, Glen Cove, NY
- 9—HURRICANE HELMS**
(8) 215, Raleigh, NC
- 10—YOSHI TATSU**
(-) 230, Gifu, Japan

TNA

World Champion:

KURT ANGLE

(C) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

- 1—MATT MORGAN**
(-) 330, Fairfield, CT
- 2—SAMOA JOE**
(4) 280, Los Angeles, CA
- 3—STING**
(2) 255, Venice Beach, CA
- 4—KEVIN NASH**
(-) 335, Detroit, MI
- 5—HERNANDEZ**
(-) 285, Houston, TX
- 6—SUICIDE**
(6) 232, Parts Unknown
- 7—DANIELS**
(-) 224, Los Angeles, CA
- 8—ROBERT ROODE**
(-) 250, New York, NY
- 9—HOMICIDE**
(-) 205, Brooklyn, NY
- 10—BOBBY LASHLEY**
(-) 252, Denver, CO

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED AUGUST 26, 2009

CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Roger Hamm; 1—Billy Lit; 2—Eric St. Clair; 3—Joey Morton; 4—Rip Manson; 5—War Machine; 6—Stacy McLamb; 7—Todd Austin; 8—Mighty Hojo; 9—Tom Sawyer; 10—Dave Scott.

COASTAL CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Dok Rivers; 1—Pablo Marquez; 2—Kahagas; 3—Sabu; 4—Bruno Sassi; 5—J.B. Cool; 6—Alex G.; 7—Mikhail Ivanoff; 8—The Warlord; 9—Chasyn Rance; 10—Jimmy Snuka.

COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING: Champion—Drake Younger; 1—Sami Callihan; 2—Jon Moxley; 3—Ego Fantastico; 4—Greg Excellent; 5—Devon Moore; 6—T.J. Cannon; 7—Bruce Maxwell; 8—Danny Havoc; 9—Tyler Veritas; 10—Adam Cole.

ELITE PRO WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Jake Davis; 1—Jim Duggan; 2—Flex Phenom; 3—Sinister Cross; 4—Leslie Leatherman; 5—Griffen; 6—Vincent Vega; 7—Man-Thing; 8—Sean Tyler; 9—Mojo the Spidermonkey; 10—Brandon Draconis.

GROUND ZERO WRESTLING: Champion—Pharaoh; 1—Martin Stanley Fuqua; 2—Eddie Diamond; 3—Phil Brown; 4—Shorty Smalls; 5—Mitch A. Palooza; 6—Mark Bravara; 7—Deimos; 8—Peter Spade; 9—Kevin Daniels; 10—Deacon Strickland.

IWF PREMIER PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Hoodlum; 1—The Miracle That Is Tony; 2—Jay Synn; 3—Joshua; 4—Prodigee; 5—Adrian Grimm; 6—Shredder Con; 7—Arik Angel; 8—Syngin Tiger Smith; 9—Damion Payne; 10—Anderson.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Michael Barry; 1—Stephen E; 2—Jake Boulder; 3—Gary Gram; 4—Doomsday; 5—Jason Jones; 6—Jim Fallon; 7—Shane Morbid; 8—Jack Legacy; 9—Dustin Heritage; 10—Bubba Hall.

TENNESSEE INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Lawman Williams; 1—Kilo; 2—P.K. Ripper; 3—Rick Cataldo; 4—Chico Mendoza; 5—Sgt. Payne; 6—Devon Day; 7—Big Brad Sampson; 8—A.C. Styles; 9—Frankie Tucker; 10—Knockout Kid.

WOMEN'S SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; 1—Nikki Roxx; 2—Rain; 3—Angel Orsini; 4—Amber O'Neal; 5—LaTasha; 6—Ariel; 7—Hailey Hatred; 8—Jessicka Havoc; 9—Alicia; 10—Cindy Rogers.

WORLD OF UNPREDICTABLE WRESTLING: Champion—Tristan Spade; 1—Tim Arson; 2—Astro Boricua; 3—The Musketeer; 4—Will Style; 5—Rick Cataldo; 6—Mikey Firezone; 7—Chris Verrazano; 8—Minyon; 9—Billy Walker; 10—David Rivera.

WORLD REVOLUTIONS ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—John Deaton; 1—Joshua La Rue; 2—Puerto Rican Punisher; 3—Tank McClain; 4—Brandon Groom; 5—Brandon Nichols; 6—Brian Black; 7—Dodder Green; 8—Mike Valentine; 9—Eric Raiden; 10—Kaoz.

XTREME INTENSE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—The DBA; 1—Jaimy Cooxx; 2. T.D.; 3—Eddie Venom; 4—Jimmy Jacobs; 5—Toby Klein; 6—Levi Blue; 7—The Necro Butcher; 8—Josh Raymond; 9—Jeff Brooks; 10—Kid Statik.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:

AUSTIN ARIES

(C) 202, Milwaukee, WI

1—TYLER BLACK

(2) 210, Davenport, IA

2—RODERICK STRONG

(4) 212, Tampa, FL

3—JERRY LYNN

(1) 185, Minneapolis, MN

4—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI

(6) 240, Schaffhausen, Switz.

5—BRYAN DANIELSON

(3) 185, Aberdeen, WA

6—COLT CABANA

(7) 233, Chicago, IL

7—KENNY OMEGA

(-) 200, Waikiki, HI

8—SONJAY DUTT

(-) 180, Bombay, India

9—DELIRIOUS

(-) 194, Edge of Sanity

10—JOEY RYAN

(-) 215, Los Angeles, CA

NWA

Champion:

BLUE DEMON JR.

(C) 228, Mexico City, Mexico

1—ADAM PEARCE

(1) 248, San Diego, CA

2—OLIVER JOHN

(2) 228, Sacramento, CA

3—APOLLO

(4) 265, Ponce, Puerto Rico

4—SCOTTY MAC

(9) 205, Kelowna, B.C.

5—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(3) 236, Tulsa, OK

6—PHIL SHATTER

(5) 247, Paris Island, SC

7—RICK FULLER

(10) 325, Middleboro, MA

8—MANABU NAKANISHI

(6) 186, Kyoto, Japan

9—EL DANDY

(7) 200, Tijuana, Mexico

10—MUSCLE GANG

(8) 297, San Diego, CA

JAPAN

1—TOGI MAKABE

(-) 243, Sagamiyara, Japan

2—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(3) 280, Tokyo, Japan

AJPW Triple Crown champion

3—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(-) 245, Kyoto, Japan

4—GO SHIOZAKI

(2) 220, Kumamoto, Japan

GHC heavyweight champion

5—HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(1) 231, Gifu, Japan

6—SUWAMA

(-) 265, Kanagawa, Japan

7—KENTA

(-) 180, Saitama, Japan

8—YUJI NAGATA

(-) 238, Chiba, Japan

9—TAKASHI SUGIURA

(-) Aichi, Japan

10—MASATO TANAKA

(-) 216, Wakayama, Japan

MEXICO

1—DR. WAGNER JR.

(2) 216, Torreon, Mexico

2—MISTICO

(5) 165, Mexico City, Mexico

3—MESIAS

(3) 245, Bayamon, Puerto Rico

4—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(1) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

5—CIBERNETICO

(-) 234, Aguascalientes, Mexico

6—NEGRO CASAS

(-) 185, Mexico City, Mexico

7—ALEX KOSLOV

(-) 190, Moscow, Russia

8—BLUE PANTHER

(-) 194, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

9—CHESSMAN

(-) Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico

10—LA SOMBRA

(-) 175, Gomez Palacio, Mexico



REMEMBER HIM?

Nobody knows exactly when, but some time between his NWA days and his WWE run, Dustin Rhodes found a cache of gold face paint. Back then, "The Natural," although bearing a resemblance to his famous father, sported a clean-cut look more reminiscent of his younger brother Cody. What are the odds Cody follows in his strange brother's golden footsteps?



check out this shot!

Just when we thought nobody could ever rival Melina's eye-popping ring entrance, along comes Layla El to prove that Melina isn't the only WWE Diva that knows how to work the ropes. You can criticize her taste in men, you can bemoan her sometimes-gruff disposition, but one thing nobody can ever say about Layla is that she's inflexible.

Photo by George Napolitano

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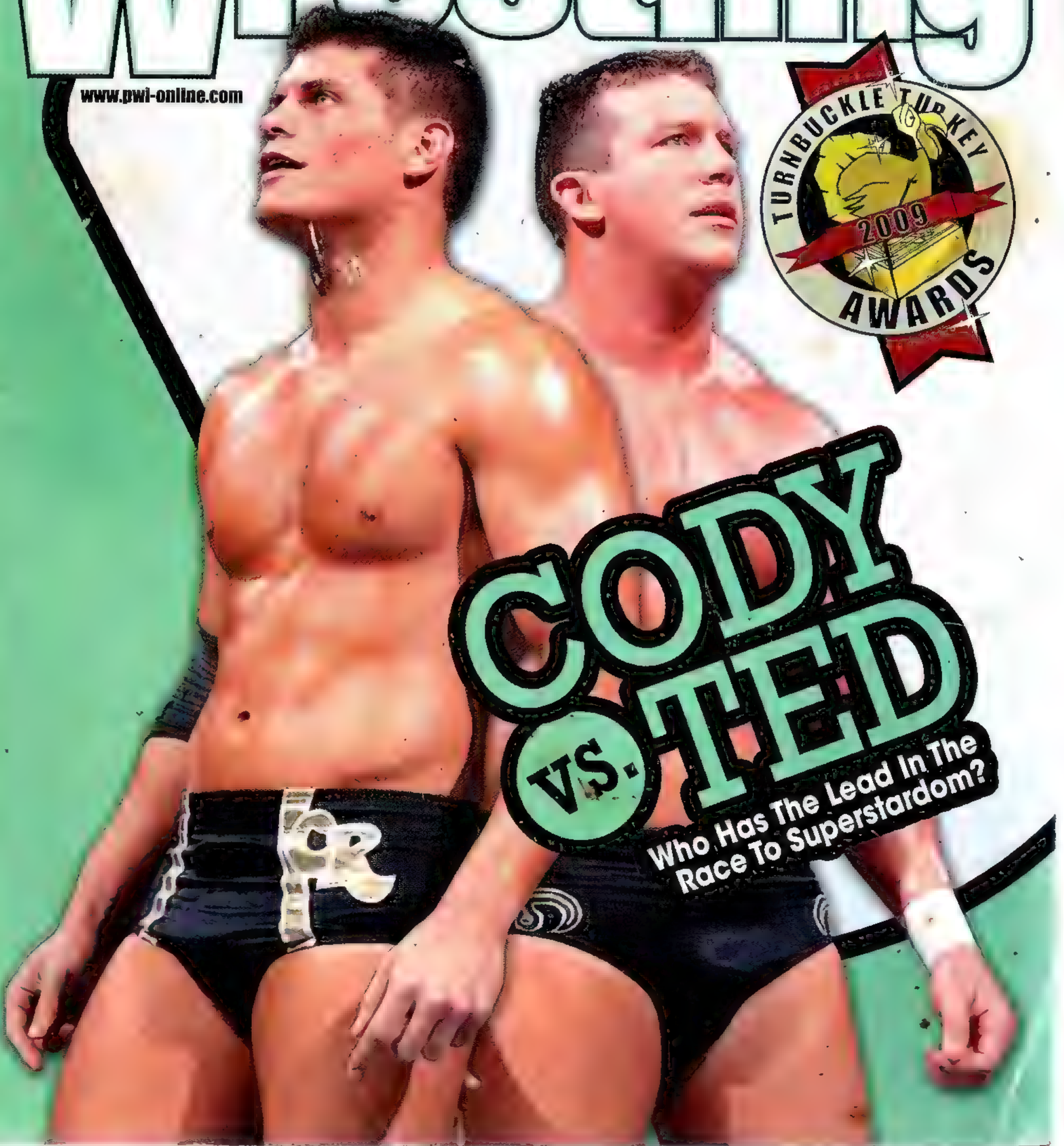
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**CODY
VS. TIED**

Who Has The Lead In The
Race To Superstardom?



inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

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- 52 STILL BREATHING FIRE! RICK STEAMBOAT'S UNLIKELY COMEBACK**
"The Dragon" doesn't know how long this phase of his career will last, but he's just happy to be competing in the ring again ... and he has Chris Jericho to thank for it!
- 56 HOTSEAT: SAMOA JOE**
"I'm an elite wrestler and I deserve to be in elite company."

COVER PHOTO:

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COVER DESIGN:

Joseph Regan

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Look for the Volume 31, 2009, issue of The Wrestler/inside Wrestling on sale December 8, 2009

GUEST HOSTS MUST GO

Okay, we get it. WWE has a ton of famous fans and people who love to promote their stuff on national television for free. But really, what do guest hosts add? Jeremy Piven and Dr. Ken were nothing short of embarrassing, Shaquille O'Neal can't move on a basketball court anymore much less in a ring, and Seth Green ... really?

I'm all for shaking things up here and there, but why not do it with your own talent? Don't just bring in some

famous actor or athlete to grab ratings for just for one night. That's like trying to plug up a dam with bubble gum. It may work for a while, but eventually the dam is going to bust open.

JAMES HARTLEY
West Plains, MO

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Sincerely Yours

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Fort Washington, PA 19034

or e-mail letters to

insideletters@yahoo.com

THREE CHEERS FOR REGAL

I have to admit, I'm a mark for William Regal. Some of the stuff he did while GM of Raw was hilarious, like shutting down the lights in the middle of a main event. Classic! After his Wellness Policy violation and subsequent suspension, I was bummed when he returned to no fanfare or push.

I was ecstatic to see him become the number-one contender for the ECW title. Finally, Regal has a chance to prove to everyone that he is as good as—if not better—than advertised.

DAVID SPELLMAN
London, England

FLOOD OF BLOOD

I just finished reading your special section on the bloodiest wrestlers of all-time (Vol. 29, 2009). I have to say it was an overall amazing section. From the short write-ups to the cool pictures, everything was spot on.

I loved seeing the mix of the old-timers and some new guys like Sabu, Sandman, and Drake Younger, not to mention the ladies! Lufisto, if you're reading this, marry me!

ROBERT WOODLAWN
Washington, D.C.

TAG TEAMS ARE BACK

I was recently at a Ring of Honor event and noticed something I hadn't before: Tag team wrestling in ROH is great. With the American Wolves and the raw intensity of Davey Richards, the high-impact wrestling of the Briscoes, and the sheer thrill of Kevin Steen and Generico, there is no doubt



Photo by George Napolitano

William Regal has been through some highs and lows over the past few years. At least one fan, David Spellman of London, England, is happy that Regal is shining in ECW.

that ROH features the best in tag team wrestling.

I think the bigger promotions need to step back and take a look at what is going on in ROH. I know that tag team wrestling will never be what it once was, but for an old fan of the sport, ROH is great!

STEVEN CAREY
Detroit, MI

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD MAN

Jeff Hardy and C.M. Punk might have put on the show of a lifetime at SummerSlam, but for me, the highlight of the night was the return of The Undertaker. Unlike Shawn Michaels, whose return had been advertised on *Raw* the previous week, I had no idea 'Taker would return at the pay-per-view. Apparently, Punk didn't know it, either. The look on Punk's face when Undertaker grabbed him for a chokeslam was priceless!

Finally, "The Dead Man" has returned and Smackdown will be fun again.

ANNE KRYZKOWICZ
Mt. Carmel, PA

SOME GUIDANCE, PLEASE

Instead of celebrating his birthday, Vegas-style, on *Raw*, Vince McMahon should have focused on restoring order to his organization. The Randy Orton-John Cena title match from SummerSlam was a complete travesty! Orton continues to make a mockery of the WWE championship by trying to get himself disqualified. I have no love for Cena, but the guy deserves a chance to compete for the championship without having to worry about Legacy or Brett DiBiase interfering on Orton's behalf or Orton walking out on the match.

If I pulled the stunts Orton did on my job, I'd be fired. Yet somehow, McMahon saw fit to waste 30 minutes of *Raw* prancing around the ring with D-X. Give me a break. If Vince

expects anybody to take the WWE championship seriously, he needs to make an example of Randy Orton, immediately.

JOSH GRINNITTS
San Francisco, CA

GIVE TNA SOME LOVE

It seems to me that knocking TNA at every turn is en vogue these days, much like criticizing WCW was fashionable years ago. Sure, TNA isn't as big or as well-established as

WWE, but people seem to forget that WWE as we know it was 50 years in the making. Give TNA some time to get its house back in order and they'll be putting on great matches. With wrestlers like Kurt Angle, A.J. Styles, and Sting on the roster, there is too much talent in TNA for the promotion not to improve. My advice to wrestling fans that are always down on TNA: Be patient.

GLORY JOHNSTON
Nashville, TN □



Current ROH tag team champions The American Wolves are just one of the hot tandems in the division right now. Reader Steven Carey of Detroit, Michigan, thinks that more people need to take notice to what is going on in ROH.

Photo by Joe Zanolle

By Harry Burkett

C.M. PUNK VOWED to rewrite the **Jeff Hardy** story at SummerSlam 2009, claiming the Cinderella version with Hardy supposedly overcoming his personal demons to become WWE heavyweight champion was unrealistic and that his own version—defeating Hardy for the title and forcing him to re-evaluate his lifestyle—was the brand of tough love required to save the “Charismatic Enigma” from himself.

Punk succeeded in rewriting at least a few chapters of the Hardy story on the August 23 pay-per-view, held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

The bout is already being touted as a Match of the Year candidate, and the highlight reel justifies the critical acclaim. Tables, ladders, and chairs were the weapons of combat as two of WWE’s most dynamic performers battled for the top prize in wrestling. The first crash-and-burn moment occurred when Hardy leaped off the top turnbuckle toward a supine Punk, lying on

a table at ringside. The wily Punk moved and Hardy’s incoming body transformed the table into splinters. A few minutes later, Punk superplexed Hardy off the top rope and onto the ladder. Punk placed a steel chair around Hardy’s neck, trying to injure the champion as he had two weeks earlier on *Smackdown*. Hardy blocked the attempt and bashed Punk repeatedly with the chair.

Then came the Jeff Hardy moment everyone was anticipating. On the arena floor, Hardy climbed a huge 13-rung ladder and back-flipped off of it, crashing into Punk, who was lying on an announcers’ table far below. Paramedics brought out the backboards and stretchers, but the two weary warriors made it back to the squared circle.

Hardy and Punk slugged it out atop the ladder inside the ring. Punk mustered one final kick, sending Hardy off the ladder and to the floor. At the 20-minute mark, the “Straight-Edge Superstar” grabbed the big gold belt to become a three-time World champion.



Went out on a high note

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And Hardy, even if denied a hard-fought victory, was granted his second wish: to at least go down in a blaze of glory.

In a bizarre twist, Punk’s title celebration was interrupted by **The Undertaker**’s entrance music. Punk motioned for “The Phenom,” but Undertaker approached him from behind and planted him with a devastating chokeslam.

Randy Orton’s WWE title defense against **John Cena** took an even odder turn, with a fan (who was later revealed to be **Brett DiBiase**) jumping into the ring and attacking referee **Scott Armstrong** as Cena applied his STF finisher on Orton. The champion regained his breath outside the ring as the fan was taken backstage. Orton, while still on the ring apron, surprised Cena with an RKO over the middle rope. Back in the ring, he executed a more precise RKO to score the pinfall after 18 minutes of action.

Triple-H and **Shawn Michaels** delighted fans with their much-anticipated **DeGeneration X** reunion (now held on a semi-annual basis), complete with a revamped theme and soldiers driving military jeeps for their entrance. **Ted DiBiase Jr.** and **Cody Rhodes** turned in their most impressive showing to date against DX, but that wasn’t enough, as Michaels superkicked Rhodes to score the pinfall.

In other bouts at SummerSlam, ECW champion **Christian** engaged the Killswitch to pin **William Regal** in *eight seconds* ... **Kane** defeated **The Great Khali** convincingly ... Unified tag team champions **Chris Jericho** & **The Big Show** beat **Cryme Tyme** ... **Montel Vontavious Porter** pinned **Jack Swagger** ... Intercontinental champion **Rey Mysterio Jr.** scored yet another win over **Dolph Ziggler**.

Although longtime fans claim WWE has lost its edge and is stuck in a creative rut, there are more indications this is part of a deliberate strategy. No, Creative isn’t trying to make a boring product, but to make it a safe haven for younger viewers. This explains **Hornswoggle**’s winning streak against **Chavo**

Undertaker delivers his own summer slam



Says you can't please everyone all the time



Photo by George Napolitano

Guerrero Jr. and other shallow storylines. So far, this approach has rewarded WWE with ratings points, increased advertising revenue, and improved live attendance.

"You can't please everybody," said John Cena regarding the diehard fans during an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. "Our business was down and the product was becoming old and stale." In the same article, Triple-H compared WWE action to **Wile E. Coyote** cartoons—a far cry from **Vince Russo's** attitude soap opera of the late-1990s.

While **Vince McMahon** has been candid about his attempts to produce a PG product across the board, it turns out his vision is grander than we imagined. In addition to securing mainstream sponsors such as

Pepsi, 7-Eleven, AT&T, and Proctor & Gamble, McMahon has unveiled his desire to launch a basic cable network—not a premium subscriber service—based on WWE's 100,000 hours of video content.

McMahon said he doesn't want to move any of WWE's shows from their current network or cable homes. He insists a WWE cable channel would strengthen its programming on USA Network, Syfy, and MyNetworkTV. During the *Los Angeles Times* interview, however, he admitted, "Having your own network allows you a lot of leverage."

You'd better hold on to USA's checkbook, **Bonnie Hammer**.

It is widely assumed the Benoit family tragedy was a major reason for McMahon revamping WWE's image. But, unfortunately, some of that "work-at-any-cost" mentality is still present within the company. Now, I'm certainly not making a direct comparison between **Matt Hardy** and **Chris Benoit**, but it was a little disturbing when Matt spilled his guts—literally—in a recent WWE Universe blog posting. He admitted to hiding a chronic abdominal injury from WWE management throughout his ECW title reign in 2008 and his feud with brother Jeff earlier this year.

Hardy claimed he was overcompensating for a hand injury he incurred against Jeff at Backlash when he suffered a ruptured abdomen against **Kofi Kingston** and Montel Vontavious Porter a couple of months ago, which led to emergency surgery. He even posted a photo of his intestines creating a grotesque

bulge under his skin. Yes, Matt always gives way too much information on these blogs.

While Hardy's passion for the business is admirable, he shrugged off the matter with his usual "Kids, don't do what I always do" routine. Come on, Matt, try practicing what you preach for once!

The alleged best wrestler on the planet now works for WWE. That's right, former Ring of Honor champion **Bryan Danielson** has finally signed a contract. The deal has been in the works for a long time, as evidenced by Danielson's appearance at the WWE Hall of Fame ceremony earlier this year and his recent trip to Los Angeles during SummerSlam weekend. **Jim Ross**, who took up Danielson as a pet cause of sorts, should be gratified.

Time to prove if his moniker is true



Photo by Joe Zanolle

WWE is allowing Danielson to honor his indy commitments through September. ROH, by the way, issued a classy press release praising Danielson as an "exemplary talent."

TNA announcers didn't mention **Kurt Angle's** recent arrest (although **Jeff Ruoss** did mention it in "What's Happening" on the flipside of this issue), but it certainly played into the drama of his World title defense against **Matt Morgan** and **Sting** at Hard Justice. Fans had several questions before the match: Would this be a convenient time for Angle to drop the TNA belt in light of his potential legal troubles? Would Morgan help Angle or look out for himself? Would Sting, now approaching the twilight of his career, be able to muster a victory and a credible title reign?

Of course, TNA fans had even more questions after the match. Angle grabbed a steel chair, motioned for Morgan to hold Sting, but Sting broke free and Angle nailed Morgan with the chair shot. Angle hastily covered the Main Event Mafia member-in-training to score the cheap victory at the 12-minute mark.

In other bouts at Hard Justice, **Kevin Nash** beat **Mick Foley** for the Legends title in a bloody mess ... World tag team champions **Scott Steiner** & **Booker T** beat **Team 3-D** ... **Samoa Joe** defeated **Homicide** for the X division title ... **ODB** & **Cody Deaner** beat **Angelina Love** & **Velvet Sky**, with ODB being awarded the Knockouts title after Deaner pinned defending champ Angelina ... IWGP heavyweight tag team cham-

NEWS ANALYSIS

A TALE OF TWO HARDYS One brother loves the business too much, and the other doesn't love it enough. While Matt struggles with an injured hand and a bursting abdominal wall just for the chance to have a high-profile match at WrestleMania 25, Jeff—despite his desire to return home to North Carolina—has been handed three world titles within only eight months. The irony is unsettling.

WWE'S UN-ATTITUDE ERA I don't miss Mark Henry having trysts with transvestites or Beaver Cleavage, but there must be a middle ground between "the cutting edge" and "family-friendly." Why do the McMahons equate family fare with dull comedy? Kurt Angle, Edge, and Christian—circa 1999—were entertaining without being offensive. Why must we settle for Goldust, Hornswoggle, and Abraham Washington?

CAN DANIELSON SURVIVE THE CURSE? Between 1999 and 2001, the Shawn Michaels Wrestling Academy produced quality wrestlers at such a rapid clip that it surpassed the Hart "Dungeon" as the sport's premier training school. Brian Kendrick, Paul London, and Lance Cade all failed to achieve greatness in WWE. I hope Bryan Danielson, after reaching full maturity on the indy circuit, can buck the trend.

IS THERE AN "AFTER-ANGLE" PLAN? Considering Kurt Angle's latest brush with the law, will TNA officials consider an alternative to building the entire company around the Olympic gold medalist? Angle is aging and his dominance is showing signs of fatigue. Only a brash upstart leader can save the Main Event Mafia. Move aside, Matt Morgan. I think Bobby Lashley—if he can exhibit some heelishness—is that man.

A RICH MULLIGAN STEW I'm relieved Blackjack Mulligan is steadily recovering from his stroke. He enjoyed a multi-faceted career as a tag team specialist with Blackjack Lanza, a fan favorite in the Mid-Atlantic, a monster heel whose clawhold prompted a red "X" across the screen on WWF TV, the protective father of Barry and Kendall Windham, and the good-natured host of "Blackjack's Barbecue." He could do it all.

pions **Brutus Magnus** & **Doug Williams** defeated **Beer Money Inc.** ... **Hernandez** steamrolled **Rob Terry** ... **Abyss** defeated **Jethro Holliday** ... **Daniels** escaped the cage to beat **Alex Shelley**, **Chris Sabin**, **The Amazing Red**, **Jay Lethal**, **Consequences Creed**, **Suicide**, and "The Pope" **D'Angelo Dinero** (Elijah Burke) in an eight-way Steel Asylum match to determine the top contender to the X division championship.

Interestingly, Angle did an interview with **Franco Fassetti** at filmsinreview.com to plug his upcoming movie, *Warrior*, in which he plays a Russian shootfighter. While on the subject of movies, he dismissed **Mickey Rourke**'s character in *The Wrestler* as being typical of most wrestlers. "The *Wrestler* was probably 75 percent accurate. The rest was a little over the top ... Mickey Rourke was one of very few wrestlers that that happened to. One is Jake [Roberts]. Everybody knows that. Iron Sheik. Other than that, a lot of wrestlers did pretty good. I think wrestling, Vince McMahon, and Dixie Carter have been picked on way too much."

As the comparisons between Angle and **Randy "The Ram" Robinson** mount, it's probably time for the TNA World champion to do some deep soul-searching.

Here's some terrific news. TNA has renewed its TV deal for three more years, ensuring *Impact* will remain on Spike TV through October 2012. In addition, Spike TV is so pleased with *Impact*'s ratings that it has agreed to 10 one-hour specials, which may hype upcoming pay-per-views, highlight TNA personalities, or even feature vintage bouts.

News from the Funking Conservatory: **The Governor** may be gone from TNA, but **The Wasilla Wrecking Crew**—**Charlotte Mahoy** and **Rachael Moore**—are causing plenty of turmoil in this Ocala, Florida-based promotion ... **Elvis Sharp** and **Shane Chung** are peeved that Funking Conservatory founder **Dory Funk Jr.** is spending more time training newcomers **Richard Bourgeois** and "Killer" **Walter Roberts** ... Former ECW star **Hack Myers** is a major presence in this promotion, at the training school and in the ring.

This 'n' that: Veteran **Johnny Graham** hopes to end the nearly two-year reign of Pro Wrestling Entertainment champion **Shane Valentine** ... 2009 Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup winner **Ryan McBride** defeated former friend **Teddy Stigma** in a grudge match in Dundalk, Maryland ... **Drew Haskins** walked out on partner **L.T. Falk** during a title defense in Millersville, Tennessee, causing them to lose the SAW International tag team belts to **Derrick King** and **J.T. Stahr**. Not surprisingly, Haskins immediately joined Derrick King Enterprises ... Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance champion **Jake "The Machine" Davis** pinned **The Man-Thing** in a wild no-disqualification match in Short Gap, West Virginia ... **Dragon Gate USA** has commissioned Wildcat Championship Belts to create a belt to represent the newly created Open the Freedom Gate

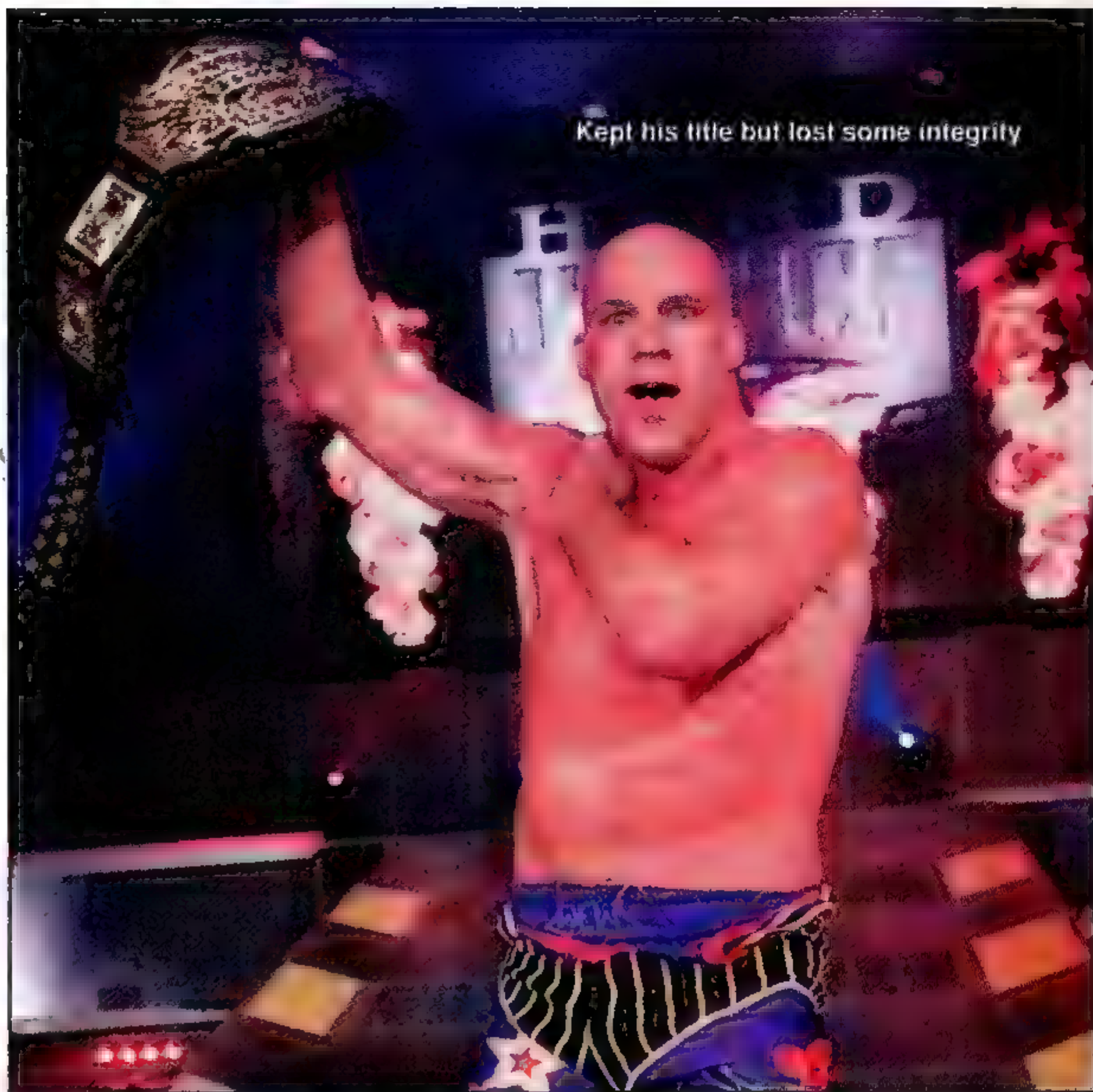


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

title. A tournament will be held on November 28 in Philadelphia to determine the first wearer of that strap ... **Jimmy Valiant** is enjoying his new role as talk-show host. His *Main Event Thursday* program airs at 5 p.m. Eastern on WWBU-FM in Radford, Virginia, and is streamed live at supersports1017.com. His guests have included Dory Funk Jr., **Superstar Graham**, **Lanny Poffo**, **Bugsy McGraw**, **George South**, and **Jimmy Hart** ... **Rick Steamboat Sr.** (sporting dyed-black hair) and **Rick Steamboat Jr.** defeated **Orlando Colon** and **Hiram Tua** at a WWC event in Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

From the Natural Enemies Dept.: The feud between former NWA tag team champions **Chase Stevens** and **Andy Douglas** continues to rage in Tennessee with no end in sight. After Stevens finally scored a definitive win over Douglas on Showtime All-Star Wrestling's weekly show, the two men raised the ante: Douglas put up his hair against Stevens' career. Stevens defeated Douglas *again* and the "Real Deal" fled the Sawmill Arena. Commissioner **Freddie Morton** forced Douglas to undergo his mandatory haircut the following week. Undeterred, a close-shaven Douglas still vowed revenge.

Before we part, I'd like to send get-well wishes to **Blackjack Mulligan**. The 66-year-old former U.S. heavyweight champion suffered a stroke that has affected his speaking and mobility. He is recuperating at his home in Florida.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

AUSTIN ARIES

HEIGHT: 5'9"

WEIGHT: 202

HOMETOWN: Milwaukee, WI

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: June 13, 2009. Makes history by becoming the first ever two-time ROH champion by defeating titleholder Jerry Lynn and Tyler Black in a three-way bout at Manhattan Mayhem III card in New York City. First held the gold five years prior and enjoyed a six-month reign.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Attacks fearlessly from the air and mixes in a solid ground game. Appears unaware of any physical disadvantages in the ring and is willing to bend the rules when necessary. Built in the mold of a classic instigator who baits opponents into making mistakes.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

From a physical perspective, tends to take way too many risks, relying heavily on high-impact/high-danger moves. Could also stand to work on his mental game a bit. Talented enough to out-think opposition, yet doesn't use that ability as often as he should.

PET FINISHER: Brainbuster and/or 450 splash

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Stepping out of his comfort zone in summer 2009. Aries paired with—and battled against—hardcore icon Necro Butcher in a series of bouts and run-ins. Culminated with Necro Butcher flipping Aries off of a ladder during his match with Jimmy Jacobs. Although he was able to hold his own in the series, Aries was a changed wrestler following his feud with Necro.

OUTLOOK FOR 2009: Aries could hold on to the ROH championship throughout the remainder of the year and beyond, but in order to do so, he must adjust his temperament and learn to pace himself.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: If the kid could check his attitude a bit, he'd truly be a great wrestler. All the tools are there and he's obviously had plenty of success. He's no fun to wrestle against, and even less fun to listen



KOFI KINGSTON

HEIGHT: 6'1"

WEIGHT: 218

HOMETOWN: Jamaica

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: June 28, 2008: At Night of Champions after being selected by Raw in the 2008 Draft.

Kingston defeats Chris Jericho to win the Intercontinental championship. His first WWE title win ended Jericho's record-setting eighth Intercontinental title reign.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: The man is pure energy from the moment he steps through the curtain until he has his hand raised following the match. Kingston benefits from having better-than-average size for the competition he faces. He can move up and use his speed to compete with World title contenders or play more of a strength game in the Intercontinental and U.S. title divisions.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: In the ring, Kingston needs to relax his enthusiasm a bit and focus more on defeating his opponents. He has lost more matches from a lack of focus than anything else. He may benefit from actually learning to tune out the fans' appreciation a bit and doing what is most beneficial to his career, even if not popular.

PET FINISHER: Trouble in Paradise

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: At WWE's Extreme Rules pay-per-view in June 2008, Raw U.S. champion Kingston successfully defended the gold in a Fatal Four-way match against MVP, William Regal and Matt Hardy. It was perhaps Kingston's toughest and most impressively wrestled match in his time with WWE.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN 2009: Kingston is bound to face against the fans at some point in 2009 because his string of success cannot last forever. Although he should be competitive throughout the end of 2009, odds are the competition will get the best of him at some point. How he recovers from any setbacks will go a long way in determining his 2009 WWE career.

INSIDE EXPERT ANALYSIS: Kofi is a fighter who competes with and somewhat intimidates his opponents. He has a natural ability to pace his matches and control the ring. —Evan Bourne



With Dave Lenker

SHAWN MICHAELS AND Sting. Sting and Shawn Michaels. It would have qualified as a dream match during the early days of the smoldering WWF vs. WCW feud of about a dozen years ago. Sting was going through his silent phase in an unusual feud with the New World Order. He went close to a year without competing in a match or speaking a word on WCW TV but was never hotter in his career.

Michaels was in the middle of DeGeneration X's first big run, feuding with Bret Hart and much of our neighbor nation to the north, and starting to get on the bad side of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin.

And although they have never met inside a ring and almost certainly never will, they have a lot in common. Both lived life in the express lane early in their careers (Michaels probably a bit more famously than Sting, who maintained a more family-friendly image publicly) only to become Christians and devoted family men later on. Less importantly, despite the fact that both had to have been tempted, neither ever "jumped" to a rival company once they reached the big time.

And, it occurred to me one night this summer, we might be saying goodbye to both of them in the next year. If we do, I get the feeling that both will resist the

temptation to return. I know that's hardly a sure thing given that it looked like Sting was through with wrestling when WCW collapsed in 2001, only to make several comebacks of varying lengths in TNA. Michaels took a four-year vacation necessitated by what looked like a career-ending back injury in 1998, returned for what was expected to be a short comeback seven SummerSlams ago, and has never really left since, save for the occasional hiatus.

Still, the end for both as wrestlers seems near. Sting has done more than hint as much over the past year, and HBK mentioned in one interview that next year's WrestleMania could be his last, as his contract is up immediately afterward.

It was what I saw in barely a 24-hour period in mid-August that got me to thinking about all this. I'd describe it as two ends of a certain spectrum for two guys for whom it seems to be winding down. Sting looked like he found some new wrestling life and energy—not easy for a 50-year-old guy, at least not from where this 40-year-old guy sits—when he unexpectedly won the TNA World championship from Samoa Joe last October. I thought he was showing his age a lot more leading up to his loss of the gold to Mick Foley this spring. But it really hit me during the three-way

World title match also involving reigning champ Kurt Angle and Matt Morgan at Hard Justice in August.

Sting wasn't necessarily bad that night, but he looked about a step and a half slow, out of place even. It was as if Angle vs. Morgan would have been more interesting and probably better. It was a bit of a downer.

The next night, Michaels electrified WWE fans by making his first appearance since WrestleMania 25 in yet another DX reunion with Triple-H. To be fair, HBK is only 44, a young buck compared with Sting, so he should have a bit more in the tank. Whereas it seems like TNA should be making plans for Sting's big sendoff soon, this may have been just the start of one last



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Though it ended in defeat, Michaels' performance at WM25 was stellar, to say the least. He has shown he can still compete at the top level, but Senior Writer Dave Lenker wonders how much longer the "Heartbreak Kid" can—or wants to—keep it going.

big run for HBK.

My first inclination that night was to throw up my hands in disgust as Hunter asked us if we ... were ... ready on that night. I wasn't all that ready for the previous reunion, but I grudgingly went along with it. Legacy cut all the theatrics short on this night, however.

But maybe I am being too critical. Fans in St. Louis that night were, indeed, ready for DX, and that's what really matters. Anyway, if my instincts prove to be spot on in this case, and this is the beginning of a glorious end, who would be the most logical final foe for "The Showstopper"? The Undertaker would be great, but been there and done that last year. A rematch would be anticlimactic, I think. Bret Hart? Sure, but it ain't 1997 anymore. Sting? I already said no to that. The Rock? Okay, we're drifting further and further from reality.

Sooner or later, you'll think as I immediately did: his good buddy Hunter.

They've feuded many times before, always treating us to exciting, intense matches. It makes sense. This DX reunion served a purpose in that Triple-H needed someone to help him stymie Legacy in the short run, but in the longer run, wasn't the last reunion supposed to be the last reunion? What else is there to do with a couple of DeGenerates who have entered middle age?

Keep it together for a few months and it's time for a heel turn for Triple-H.

Build it to a crescendo at the Royal Rumble and sign it for the big day in Glendale, Arizona, next spring. I'd picture hatred between the two morphing back into respect as the match, a 30-minute-or-so classic, developed. The emotion in the arena probably couldn't reach the level we saw and felt when Ric Flair was retired by none other than Michaels at WrestleMania 24, but I still think it could be a moment to remember for a long, long time.

For Sting. I haven't really envisioned the ideal scenario. It's tougher given that TNA's live events are put together on a much smaller scale, and the history



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Sting's passion for wrestling has been in question for years. But with his recent TNA World title run and his continued battle against the MEM, that passion is clearly still there. Now the question is can his body continue to match his passion, and for how much longer?

between wrestler and promotion isn't nearly as long or as storied. It's not like TNA has access or can gain access to all the historic footage that made his career. The level of emotion when it happens—again, soon, I hope—can't possibly be there.

Not too long ago, I might have suggested Mick Foley or maybe even Kevin Nash or TNA co-founder Jeff Jarrett, but the first two have just been done, and the third possibility seems rather remote at this point.

There was a time when some questioned Sting's passion for wrestling, but I think he has done more than enough to silence that talk. If he's not broke and still going at 50, it must be there. Which is why he deserves to go out with as much fanfare as that guy in that other company whom he's never had the pleasure of facing. □

By Brandi Mankiewicz

EVERY ONCE IN a while, a person comes into your life and changes it in some significant way. They may not even know it. The mere presence of this person could immediately bring a room to life. I am honored to have known several people of this ilk in my writing career, but there is one who deserves more recognition than most. Unfortunately, my love for this person must be exposed in a eulogy.

On July 10, while the sun baked the northern hemisphere, the light in my redneck of the woods got

much dimmer as longtime independent manager Barry Casino quietly passed away at just 55 years old. Barry's death may not have even made the rounds of the other so-called major wrestling news outlets, but it was big news for those who had the pleasure of watching him ply his craft in East Coast Wrestling Association, Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling, Maryland Championship Wrestling, and others in the Delmarva peninsula. Sure, Barry wasn't "big time" to wrestling's snobbish aficionados, but he was larger than life to those

of us who knew him.

For those of you were unlucky enough to not have seen Barry Casino in action, you truly missed a gem. His managerial style was that of a bygone era. Picture a love child that is the product of Jim Cornette and Percy Pringle III. He had that svelte "body by Buddy Rose" type physique combined with the quick wit of Cornette and the aristocratic manners of Pringle.

Barry was quite literally one of the most colorful managers of his era. He was always dressed in a rainbow of colors. Strike that. Barry's clothing choices often made a rainbow seem dull and gray. Florescent colors were often present—under a pile rhinestone studs and ropes of gold chains emblazoned with diamonds. His outrageous outfits were often the highlight of the wrestling show.

"My second professional wrestling match took place in 1993 at the Delaware City Fire Hall for the ECWA," remembers "Wiseguy" Jimmy Cicero. "When I first walked into the Fire Hall earlier that evening I saw the rotund Casino sitting back laughing away as he often did and drinking a gallon of milk. He was wearing lime green pants, an orange shirt with yellow suspenders, and a glittery green hat. Talk about first impressions. I thought this guy was either really odd or color blind. He wasn't color blind; Barry was different all right, but in a very entertaining way.

"The fans loved to hate him and the boys in the wrestling business just plain loved him," continued Cicero. "In reality, Barry was a very kind and compassionate man who just enjoyed putting on a good show."

Barry was the epitome of what a



Photo by Brandi Mankiewicz

Barry Casino drew attention to himself with his witty one-liners and by the way he dressed, but columnist Brandi Mankiewicz will always love him for the profound personal impact he had on her life and those of the wrestlers he encountered.

great heel manager should be. He knew just what to say to rile up a crowd and exactly which ringside fans he should skewer in order to keep an interest in the show.

"As a manager, he was one of the best. His promos were always spot on, and he knew how to work a crowd," said fellow former ECWA manager E.S. Easton. "Less was more, and the fans loved to jeer him. He and Mr. Ooh La La had the greatest chemistry together! One could have learned a lot from watching one of Barry's matches, and the fans were certainly entertained for many years."

Barry's influence was felt by everyone he met. His boisterous laugh could be heard echoing in any arena in which he was set to perform that night. He had a special way to deal with his new charges, making them feel welcome.

"He was my first manager for ECWA," said Steve Corino. "I was so green and didn't belong in a locker room with Simon Diamond, Billy Kidman, Ace Darling, and Devon Storm, but all of them made me feel welcome. Barry would talk to me and tell me just to relax and to follow them wherever they went. He was just so much fun to be around."

Longtime charge Mr. Ooh La La swears that Barry's presence didn't necessarily help him win matches, but "listening to his introduction of me could unnerve even the casual fan and upset the crowd and create a remarkable hostile environment to be proud of. His flamboyant ring attire, sharp tongue, and obnoxious whistle were just the beginning."

Mr. Ooh La La's former partner Mozart Fontaine was a little nicer to his former leader—sort of. "There was nothing fast about Barry," said Mozart. "Most of his work was from



Photo by Tim Walker

Barry was the classic heel manager, taking cheap shots at men like Boogie Woogie Brown, who could have ripped him to pieces if he was not in a weakened state.

the ground level, like tripping my opponents with his cane. His timing was impeccable, though."

While many fans only saw the bright, bitchy side of Barry at shows, there was a whole lot of shenanigans for which he will be fondly remembered. Unfortunately, though, most of his greatest quotes will go unpublished.

"Barry's greatest one-liners were backstage and you can't print them in a family magazine!" said Mozart.

Despite never truly attaining a level most fans would consider successful, Barry didn't care. He was just happy to be out there, entertaining the crowds and wreaking havoc on any wrestler the fans even remotely liked. Barry Casino's true legacy is in his bonds with friends and the way he treated them.

"I will miss Barry very much," said

Ace Darling. "I had the honor of making a speech for Barry and presenting him with an award at the ECWA's anniversary dinner. We had a lot of laughs and I'm left with a lot of good memories."

Cueball Carmichael concurred. "Barry always was a gentleman—and I do not throw around that comment loosely. I wish I could say that about all the guys in the biz, but I can't. Only a handful come to mind and Barry's at the top of that list."

Barry's legacy can best be summed up by the main target of his nefarious charges throughout the years: ECWA's longtime resident do-gooder Cheetah Master.

"A 'good guy' is only as good the 'bad guy' makes him," surmised Cheetah. "He made me good many times. I hope there are rhinestones in heaven for Barry." □

BORN INTO A military family stationed in Wiesbaden, West Germany, in 1975 ... Led a relatively quiet childhood ... Not much of an athletic background ... Attended college and studied acting and film production ... Graduated from Georgia State University in 1998 ... Made life-altering decision to explore the world of professional wrestling one year later ... Answered a casting call from WCW looking for new female talent ... Appeared as David Flair's psychotic girlfriend later that year ... Managed the tag team of Flair and Crowbar ... Often intervened on their behalf during matches ... Trademark became dark, gothic look and ear-piercing screams ... Relationship with Flair strained through 2000 ... Became co-cruiserweight champion with Crowbar following a mixed-tag match against Chris Candido and Tammy Lynn Sytch ... Inadvertently became solo cruiserweight champion the following week on *Monday Nitro* ... Covered a supine Crowbar to become only the second female cruiserweight champ in WCW history ... Lost the title and her man shortly thereafter ... Feuded briefly with both Miss Hancock (Stacy Keibler) and Torrie Wilson ... Defeated Hancock in a wedding gown match for the affections of Flair ... Left the company in 2001 prior to WWF's purchase of WCW ... Continued to hone her craft on the independent circuit ... Moved more toward full-time wrestler rather than manager ... Briefly appeared with TNA in 2002 ... Spent a short amount of time in WWE developmental territory Ohio Valley

Wrestling as well as Ring of Honor ... Paired with then-boyfriend C.M. Punk in ROH ... Never caught on full-time with either ... Lasted only eight months in WWE developmental deal ... Officially retired from the ring shortly thereafter ... Took odd jobs as a personal trainer and part-time model ... Returned to the ring in late-2005 ... Competed for promotions such as Women's Extreme Wrestling and SHIMMER ... Captured the NWA Wrestling-Birmingham (Alabama) Junior title

tion into believing she truly was the governor of Alaska ... Attacked by the group for her efforts ... Continued feud with The Beautiful People through Destination X 2009 ... Paired with Roxxi and Wilde to defeat their enemies at the pay-per-view ... Feud, and gimmick, ended shortly thereafter ... Suffered humiliating beatdown and haircut at the hands of The Beautiful People ... Returned to her dark ways in early-spring 2009 ... Failed to capture the Knockouts title in a Queen of the

Cage match at Lockdown 2009 ... Turned against former ally Wilde only a few weeks later ... Allowed Wilde to suffer the same humiliation at the hands of The Beautiful People she was forced to endure ... Personal feud with Wilde continued throughout most of 2009 ... Began appearing with Abyss and personal therapist Dr. Stevie during the feud ... Lost to Wilde in the

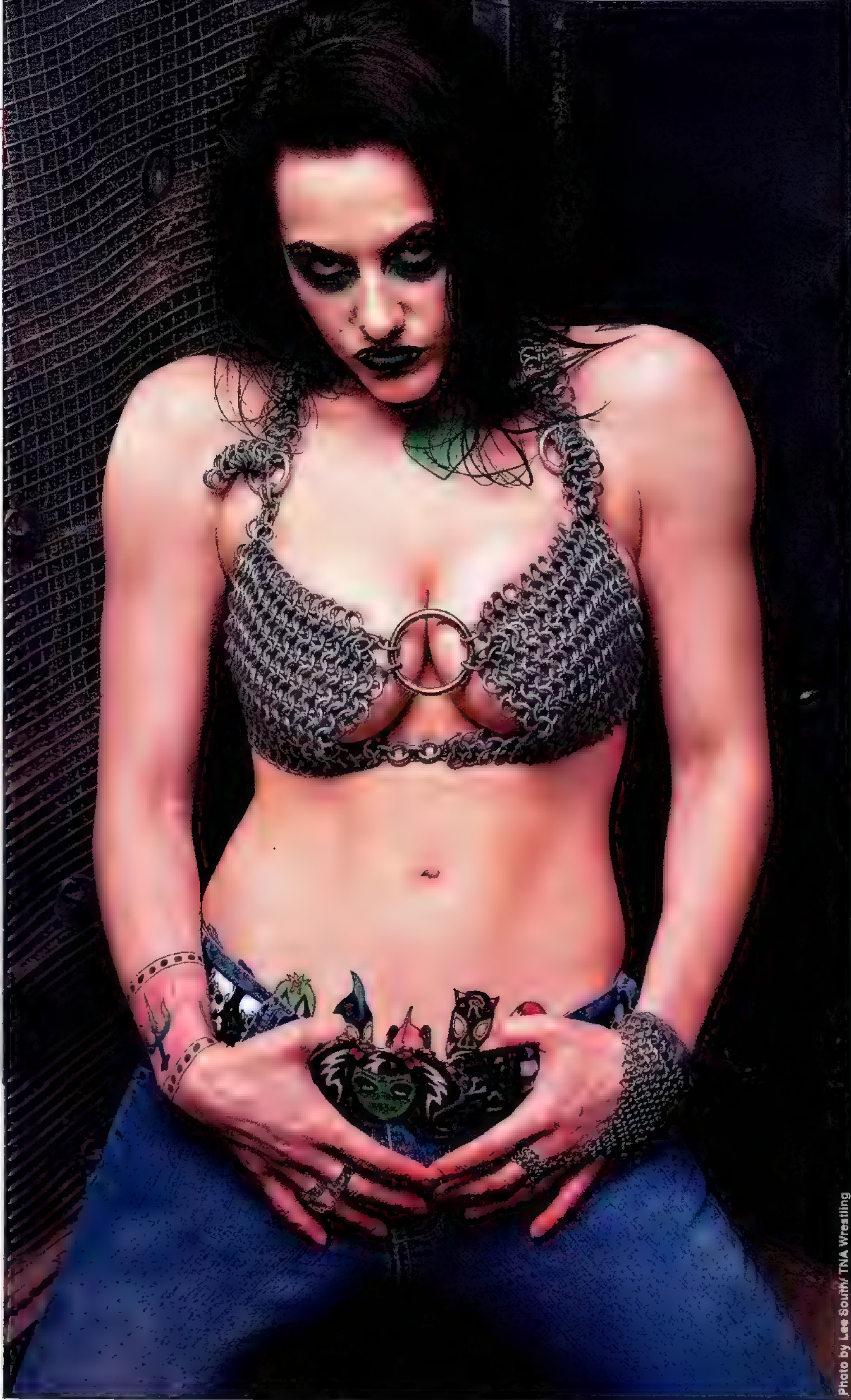


Once united in their disdain for The Beautiful People, Daffney and Taylor Wilde have become bitter foes in TNA's Knockouts division ... all thanks to Daffney's sneak-attack on the former champ.

twice while on the independent circuit ... Gimmick was far less goth and far more mainstream ... Mimicked the popular film *Million Dollar Baby* ... Returned to the main stage in a string of appearances with TNA in 2008 ... Initially re-emerged as her regular, screaming self ... Was a surprise contestant in the \$25,000 Awesome Kong Challenge ... Could not defeat the then-Knockouts champion for the bounty ... Began appearing as "The Governor" of Alaska in late-2008 ... Teamed with Taylor Wilde and Roxxi Leveaux in their feud with The Beautiful People ... Tricked the fac-

first Women's Monster's Ball match at Sacrifice ... Gained revenge on her foe shortly thereafter ... Aligned with a returning Raven in mid-2009 ... Acted as an intermediary between her doctor and new mentor ... Paired with Raven in a loss to Abyss and Wilde at Slammiversary in a Monster's Ball mixed tag team match ... Took a brutal fall on to a pile of thumbtacks during the match ... Inspired by the carnage, engaged in the first-ever Knockouts Match of 10,000 Tacks on *Impact* ... Failed to defeat Wilde, yet again, but in TNA seems to have found a place to call home. □

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



DAFFNEY

350

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

By Mike Lano

Mustafa Saed

LOOKING AT FORMER SMW and ECW tag team champion Mustafa Saed today, it's difficult to believe this is the same person that, with long-time friend New Jack, earned his living by tearing up people's foreheads with cheese graters.

However, Terrance Ladd, who legally changed his name to Jamal Mustafa, is now every bit the corporate executive. The bespectacled Mustafa is employed by Donald Trump, marketing The Donald's new high-tech video telephones and other products at springtime.acn-rep.com.

For Saed, it's a fulfilling new occupation with a neat fringe benefit. "I get to help connect people and families," he said with a smile.

Saed has had some unique bosses in his life, and Trump certainly fits into that category. "He really does remind me of Vince [McMahon], that larger than life aura," Saed said. "And he's really given me a great opportunity in this new stage of my life. I get to work with all sorts of people and travel—things I was already used to. And I've definitely matured and grown as a person since my days primarily working as a wrestler."

Now, family comes first, and one usually hears the voices of his children in the background when he speaks to you from his home in Nevada. "When I'm home now," he said, "I try to be the world's best father. I even get to play more now and be relaxed. The *real* Mustafa."

This Mustafa is a far cry from the version that captivated fans in Memphis and Philadelphia with his vicious antics during the early-to-mid-'90s. Unfortunately, though, despite The Gangstas' popularity, the team was never given an opportunity to perform for prime time audiences.

"WWE just didn't want us, I was told. They looked at our

contract toward the end of the company, and I believe Vince was behind ECW for years," he said. "But his people thought we were legit—too dangerous, too much like our on-camera characters. Well, that is basically how we were. We really were from the streets and took what we were doing in real life and decided to bring it to wrestling, which I think was a first. We were real! What you saw was us, not like the milquetoast version of us out now who pretend to be thugs (Cryme Tyme), who they can control. I still believe to this day, the WWF was scared of us ... and don't get me started on what their version of ECW is now."

Despite these few misgivings with the current product, Saed has fond memories of his earlier days in the ring.

"Lots of great memories wrestling with greats in Smoky Mountain Wrestling such as The Rock 'n' Roll

Express, The Heavenly Bodies, Dirty White Boy, Mick Foley, Chris Candido, and Mahoney. But we became totally about violence when we got to ECW because look at who Paul Heyman paired us with to start with—Public Enemy.

"Later, working with the Dudleys, we tried to add some wrestling back in with the brawling. To this day, I miss those wild fans at all the ECW shows. That common bond with the people is often missing today, but you can feel it at some of the indies."

Currently, Saed wrestles when time permits at various independents, where he's usually billed as "Mr. Mustafa." He also ventures onto the reunion show circuit. "I enjoyed being at the latest XPW reunion. Me and Jerome [Young, p.k.a. New Jack] were brothers all over again, just like old times. We've also been together at other fan



Photo by Jason Laven



Mustafa Saed was hardcore enough to bang with D-Von Dudley (left) and Kronus of The Eliminators (above), but, being trained by Gene Anderson, he could also hold his own in more traditional matches.

events this year. Sometimes we'll have a little disagreement here and there, like any brothers, and maybe not talk for a while. But we're always family, bottom line, since we were friends running around, way before wrestling. We'll always be brothers in that sense. I still like to think I was the wrestler part of the team, and he

was the talker/brawler."

New Jack might disagree, but considering the training Saed underwent, he might have a point. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Saed was trained originally by Gene Anderson for Classic Pro-Wrestling in North Carolina. Later, at WCW's Power Plant, he worked as Jamal Mustapha, under Jody Hamilton and Sgt. Buddy Lee Parker before turning pro in 1992. "Jody and Sarge were tough but great trainers," he recalls.

Up next for the former Gangsta will be a recurring role as "The Benefactor" in San Francisco's Fog City Wrestling promotion. "I'll play a Godfather, money-man type financing their lead heel manager, Caesar Black, and his stable of heels. It's a very diverse locker room there, so we have made some progress in wrestling."

Still, Saed would like to see more progress made in a different vein. "In 2009, we also need to finally make this business a better, safer industry for the boys," he said. "We've lost too many, and it pains me each time I hear someone has passed away too young, whatever the cause."

Fortunately, Mustafa Saed not only survived the tumultuous times, he's thrived. □

Photo by Mike Labin



When he isn't busy marketing electronic products for Donald Trump or playing with his kids, Saed performs at various independent shows. Here he watches the action on a backstage monitor with some co-workers.

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

PHILADELPHIA, PA: Been to the ECW Arena/Arena/New Alhambra/Old Alhambra—whatever the old bingo joint is/was/will be called far too many times to count or even remember and, Man Upstairs willing, plan to stop by a few more times before going to meet that Man Upstairs. This trip was different, though. Not because the card was anything that special, but because it really felt like the end. ¶ Show was called Legends of the Arena, but what it really was a chance to say goodbye to ECW. Not the impostor that's part of Vince McMahon's kingdom these days,

but the real ECW in its old home. Francine organized it as a cancer fundraiser. Poor girl lost her mother and sister within a few days to a disease that's affected every last one of us in some way. Good news is another sister beat it and was in attendance. ¶ A lot of guys who were the real blood and guts of ECW were there—Sandman, Sabu, Tod Gordon, Raven, Justin Credible, C.W. Anderson, Mahoney, Axl Rotten, Al Snow, 2 Cold Scorpio—and a few bit players, too (who could forget The Musketeer?). Sadly, Shane Douglas no-showed, but the 600 or so in the house liked seeing Jerry Lynn as his replacement against Snow. Sabu and

Sandman beat Raven and Credible in the main event, with Terry Funk refereeing. ¶ Need proof that this ECW is now part of a bygone era? Little Tyler Fullington, Sandman's kid, was in attendance again, though he's now 20 and far from little anymore. Supposedly he was there to get revenge on Raven, his former demented mentor, after all these years. Sandman's youngest son, 15-year-old Oliver, DDT'd Raven, leading to the pin. ¶ So odd to see Francine—"The Queen Of Extreme"—standing there so pregnant in the ring (she later gave birth to a healthy daughter). But then I hear both Dawn Marie and Beulah are much further along in their quests to become soccer moms. Credible of all people let his guard down at the end and summed it up nicely to the crowd: "Thank you for giving me the best four years of my life."

ORLANDO, FL: TNA couldn't have had a more disturbingly appropriate name for its August pay-per-view—not this year anyway. On the same weekend Kurt Angle got locked up for possession of HGH and violating a restraining order in a dispute with a former girlfriend (TNA's Rhaka Khan), we got Hard Justice. You can read more specifics from the police blotter in the "Turkey Awards" section in this issue. We'll see about hard justice for Angle down the line, as he, of course, is proclaiming his innocence and saying there was a set-up. ¶ Angle somehow managed to make it here from Pittsburgh in time to defend the TNA World title against Sting and Matt Morgan. Match-up interested me because you had one guy at the end of his career in Sting, one guy probably in the middle if he can get his life straightened out



Photo by Joe Zimolle

A HARDCORE REASON TO FIGHT

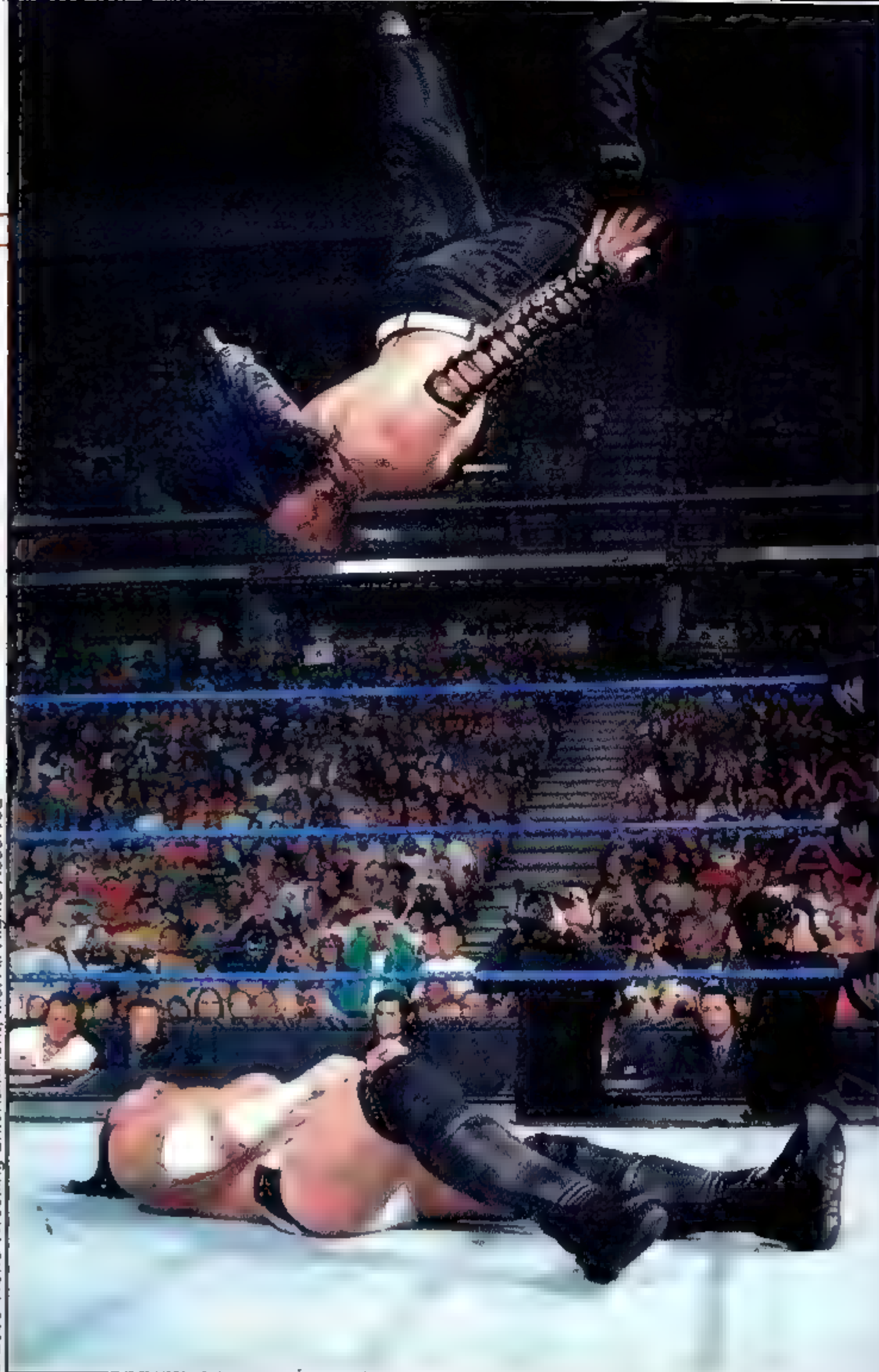
in Angle, and one guy in Morgan who should be just in the figurative beginning. ¶It's hard for anyone new to squeeze into the main-event mix in TNA or WWE these days, but folks like Jim Cornette were telling me way back when Morgan was a blue-chipper in OVW he had all the tools. Surprised me that McMahon didn't do big things with a man with that size, look, and agility. Not a bad talker, either. ¶Morgan got pinned by Angle in the end after some shenanigans, but he was clearly the star of the bout. He seemed to be lacking confidence in the past, but that's no longer a problem. He's walking that fine line between confident and cocky. TNA would be making a big mistake if it doesn't put more World title matches in his future.

ANDERSON, SC: Mixed in a few days of R&R outside Myrtle Beach this summer. Matt Brock has never been big on beaches, but he won't be so quick to turn down an evening casino cruise out into the Intercoastal Waterway. ¶I still had a few days left on the rental car Saks so generously agreed to pay for (part of it anyway), so I figured I'd find a way to earn the expense check and wound up at a Mid-Atlantic Championship Wrestling show. I was one of more than close to 1,500—damn good for an indy card—who showed up at "Summer Bash 2009." ¶Could have thrown together a half-year's worth of "Whatever Happened To ...?" columns. Who knew Bobby Eaton and Buff Bagwell's championship days were a thing of the present. Bagwell defended his heavyweight title against J.W. Boss, while hardcore champion Eaton bested Trooper Jeff Justice and Andru Bane in a three-way that wasn't all that hard-

core but seemed to entertain everyone just fine. Ric Flair was there signing autographs and got a chance to see his old pal Rick Steamboat's son, Ricky Jr., drop a decision to junior heavyweight champ Rikki Nelson. Rickie Jr. looks a ways away from being ready for anything big, but Flair liked what he saw. "I wouldn't bet against those genes, Brock," Flair told me. "He's coming along slow and steady now, but one of these days, it'll all click and that kid will be something special." Something tells me you'll still be making the rounds to see it happen, Ric.

LOS ANGELES, CA: Took me longer than most to come around on Jeff Hardy, and I never thought he'd end up with three world championships on his resume, even if all three ended up as reigns that would have made Stan Stasiak proud. Hardy has always had his legion of loyal fans, but over the last year, he's made even those who dismissed him as just a daredevil teen heartthrob stand up and salute him. ¶This year's SummerSlam may have been his gutsiest performance yet. It was no secret going in that this was going to be his last WWE match for a while at least, and though he probably couldn't have gotten away with mailing it in in a TLC match with C.M. Punk, he

could have tried to minimize the trauma to his body. ¶But when you put out your opponent through a table with a swanton off a ladder and at one point get off the stretcher you've been placed on and tear off the neck brace that's been put on you in order to continue, you have the kind of guts that even the most jaded old scribe has to admire. ¶Hardy ultimately lost the World title back to Punk, but if you can believe Matt Brock of all people is telling you this, the final result almost didn't matter. A lot of people came to SummerSlam or ordered SummerSlam to see the return of DX and to see something special in this match. I could have done without the original version of DX a decade-plus ago, but this match was something pretty special and a hell of a way for Hardy to go out ... for now anyway. □



WENT OUT FIGHTING

THE



WHO HAS THE LEAD IN THE RACE TO SUPERSTARDOM?

By Eric Colby

CODY RHODES and Ted DiBiase Jr. have made a significant impact on WWE since uniting with Randy Orton and forming Legacy. Forming a group led by a veteran superstar is a formula that has worked well for many champions, including Orton himself (see *Evolution*).

But eventually the younger two-thirds of Legacy will want to fly on their own and establish themselves as bona fide WWE world championship contenders. Whether they decide to turn on Orton or wait until he loses the championship and





Photo by George Napolitano

Ted DiBiase Jr. is physically bigger than his partner Cody Rhodes, but Rhodes uses his physical assets more effectively than DiBiase. Overall, both men stack up evenly.

then challenge the new titleholder remains to be seen, but many are asking which of the two will win the race to elite superstardom. Each has his own strengths and weaknesses, so let's take a closer look at some of them:

PHYSICAL

At 6'3" and 235 well-structured pounds, DiBiase has a slight edge in size and strength over the 6'1", 223-pound Rhodes—and when they stand next to each other, DiBiase just looks bigger. But sheer size isn't everything in the physical game. In matches against the likes of Batista, who towers over him, Rhodes has shown he can hold his own. While DiBiase is bigger, Rhodes may know how to use his frame better. In the end, the two seem to carry themselves, physically, just the right way for their build.

Advantage: Even

EXPERIENCE

Both stars have been raised in the wrestling business with their

legendary fathers, not to mention that each has at least one sibling currently involved in the business as well. In addition to his dad, Rhodes has trained with such greats as Al Snow and is the godson of Magnum T.A. DiBiase worked with Chris

Youngblood and took his training further at Harley Race's Wrestling Academy. In their developmental years, Rhodes was a freestyle wrestler in high school, winning the Georgia state tournament at 189 pounds two years in a row. DiBiase



Photo by Shane M. Kiddier

With a strong amateur background Cody knows how to twist and turn his opponents in any way he wants. Rey Mysterio Jr. learned first hand that, though he may be young in age, Rhodes has the experience of a seasoned veteran.

took the multi-sport route, starring as a quarterback in high school and then played wide receiver, as well as soccer, in college. Rhodes made his WWE debut in July of 2007, while DiBiase appeared nearly a year later in May of 2008. Rhodes has benefited from his brief rivalry and ensuing partnership with Hardcore Holly, while DiBiase has been linked with Rhodes and Orton seemingly from his arrival on the scene. Rhodes has the solid amateur wrestling background along with the more diverse individual abilities.

Advantage: Rhodes

RING GENERALSHIP

No matter how much training a wrestler has, if he can't get the job done in the ring, he won't become a star. Both Rhodes and DiBiase can compete at a high level, that is for certain. But who really commands the ring? Rhodes has shown competency when put in the position to lead. He could have been said to be the head figure of Priceless when they first started, but that has all changed. Since standing up to Orton on live television, there has been something different in DiBiase's eyes. He showed in his match against Orton that he can hang with the very best, and he takes control of the mike when someone from Priceless needs to be heard. With his size, speed, and charisma, DiBiase has proven more than once that he knows how to command the ring.

Advantage: DiBiase

FINISHING MOVE

Even though he says he doesn't want to live in the "Million-Dollar Man's" shadow, DiBiase's Dream Street finisher is a direct derivative of the Million-Dollar Dream sleeperhold. It's effective because the slam onto the back of the neck will definitely disable an opponent, allowing DiBiase to get the win. But Rhodes' Crossroads is nasty, effective because the move

HOW LUCKY IS CODY RHODES?

If you look at his father, Dusty Rhodes, you can see that genetics could easily have gone against Cody Rhodes in his pursuit of wrestling stardom. Unlike his legendary father, Cody has already achieved so much at a young age. He's also more athletic and better looking than his dad was throughout his career. Cody's pure wrestling skills surpassed those of "The American Dream" while Cody was still in high school and he moves around the ring with the speed, control, and agility that only a pure athlete possesses. Additionally, because he's a little on the quieter side, Cody doesn't seem as likely to make a bad situation worse by running his mouth. We all know that he plans to become a bigger star than his father ever was because Cody says it every week, but he doesn't have his father's natural ability to incite opponents into a bloodthirsty rage.

Dusty, on the other hand, was a larger-than-life figure, both physically and in his personality. He's always been the first to admit that he didn't have a natural athlete's body. When you consider that he was working that much harder to carry extra weight while absorbing the angry beatings that he often brought upon himself with his trademark verbal assaults, you realize how much punishment the older Rhodes took through his legendary career. Dating back to the 1970s, Rhodes had a vicious feud with Superstar Billy Graham for the WWF championship and through the decades he has had bitter battles with Ric Flair, Terry Funk, Tully Blanchard, Ted DiBiase Sr., and others.

Whether you look at his physique or personality, Cody is lucky he hasn't emulated his dad. And if he has half the career Dusty had, Cody Rhodes will be even luckier.

—Eric Colby



How it could have been ...



Since joining Legacy, DiBiase has done more than Rhodes to assert himself on the mike and on the mat. He is a superior ring general to his partner.

completely twists an opponents' neck after spinning him 180 degrees before slamming him down. The combination of disorienting the opponent and crashing him to the mat headfirst make the Crossroads the more effective finisher.

Advantage: Rhodes

AGGRESSION AND FOCUS

If you think these aren't important to the development of a young wrestler, look at someone like Charlie Haas, someone who has all the talent in the world but doesn't get that one big win to propel him forward because he loses focus. Both DiBiase and Rhodes have the aggression, but the edge in focus would have to go to Rhodes because he's never questioned Orton's leadership or the group's position in the business. DiBiase has clashed with Orton and even willingly fought Orton on *Raw* when his father made the match. This doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of focus, but you can see DiBiase pause and look to the crowd when he gets cheers from them. Plus, in the back of his mind will always be the fact that Orton put him out of action for a spell after a boot to the head. Rhodes, on the other hand, maintains his focus



Rhodes' loyalty to Orton can never be questioned. DiBiase, on the other hand, has twice locked horns with the WWE champion.

whether it's during a match or in a post-match assault to help Orton.

Advantage: Rhodes

STAR POWER

Rhodes' youthful looks and often pouty facial expression make it easy for fans to dislike him, but he doesn't get the explosive reaction, either positive or negative, from the crowds when he makes an appearance or takes the microphone. Conversely, recall when DiBiase made his return after his head injury, the crowd went wild. Even though he didn't do what the fans wanted in the end, DiBiase still gets a more raucous response on a regular basis. If he were to turn on Orton and go it alone, DiBiase would quickly become a fan favorite with his combination of looks and

in-ring skills. That's why he was tapped to star in *The Marine 2*.

Advantage: DiBiase

THE FINAL COUNT

Based on his durability, amateur wrestling background, ring command, and aggression, Rhodes appears to be more likely to ascend to the rarified heights of superstardom within WWE. He would do well to emulate some of his father's or even his partner's vocal skills, and with some more airtime, he will likely improve that one weak part of his game. Perhaps a manager/valet type assistant would be a good move on his part to allow Rhodes to forge ahead on his own and become the star everyone is waiting for. □



It's not every day WWE asks an up-and-coming wrestler to star in one of its film projects. Just being given that nod of approval from the company proves DiBiase has considerable star power.



Because Rhodes ranks higher in more categories than DiBiase, we feel he's more likely than his partner to become a bigger WWE superstar sooner. Of course, DiBiase has enough going for him to prove us wrong.

PRESENTING THE TURNBUCKLE TURKEY AWARDS



THANKSGIVING MAY STILL be a few weeks away, but the staff of *INSIDE WRESTLING* is already in the holiday spirit and hard at work carving up some of wrestling's biggest turkeys.

Our annual Turnbuckle Turkey section is where we call out 10 of the biggest turkeys of the past year for their boneheaded decisions and overall foolishness. We usually try to keep this section relatively light-hearted and stick to happenings inside the ring (such as E. Stan Kroenke for his arena scheduling error and Vince McMahon's subsequent and silly overblown reaction), but this year's crop of Turkeys has a more serious undertone. A few of this year's "honorees" were arrested. Others are struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. Some have shown disturbingly poor judgment that could threaten both themselves and people around them.

The intent of this section is not for us to pretend to be holier-than-thou and to throw stones at people who have made mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. The difference is that many of the people featured on the following pages made the initial mistake and have either not apologized or not taken full responsibility for their actions. That makes them turkeys in our book.

With some luck, maybe the criticisms we dole out in this section will provide the impetus for some of our Turkeys to turn their lives around. Maybe getting called out in print might be the slap in the face they need to get their priorities back in order. After all,

each of these individuals is a role model, whether they want to be or not. Kids pay attention to their heroes, and when those heroes refuse to go to rehab (Umaga), resort to violence when wronged (Austin Aries and Scott Hall), or use a cell phone camera in ways they shouldn't (Matt Striker, we're looking at you — unfortunately), they are setting a poor example to the fans who look up to them.

That's enough of the preaching. While this year's Turkey section is a bit heavier than previous years, we're also trying to entertain. Let's face it, there's also something amusing about Hulk Hogan's woefully misguided remarks about his ex-wife and Kurt Angle's dual role as self-proclaimed victim and alleged stalker. We hope you enjoy the following section in the spirit in which it is intended: to entertain, to inform, and to make a point.

One person who just barely escaped the turkey roast was Gail Kim, who we planned to take to task for abandoning the TNA Knockouts division to become mired in mediocrity in WWE. A renewed WWE push in recent week, combined with Angle's August 15 arrest, inspired us to replace Kim with Kurt. But Kim's not exactly free and clear with us yet. We still have high expectations for her, and if she doesn't win gold in WWE soon, she's a prime contender for the 2010 Turkey Awards.

Enough with the appetizer ... it's time for the main course!

Strictly speaking, there's nothing wrong with Jeff Jarrett maintaining a personal relationship with Kurt Angle's ex-wife, Karen. After all, Jarrett and Angle are both single adults, and they are free to date whomever they choose.

But that doesn't mean it's a good idea.

There are certain unspoken rules in the locker room, and chief among them is that an athlete doesn't date a teammate's ex-girlfriend or ex-wife. And even if a relationship were to develop, the respectful thing to do would be for the two men to privately discuss matters and determine if a romantic relationship would create tension in the workplace.

That's simple courtesy. However, Jarrett's relationship with Karen is even more troubling because Jarrett is a partial owner of TNA, meaning Jarrett is one of Angle's bosses. How would you feel if you found out your boss was dating the mother of your children... especially when you had to find out about it from an anonymous caller on a morning radio talk show?

The Jarrett/Karen relationship is rumored to have been going on for several months, and some people in the TNA locker room may have had an inkling that Karen was spending time at Jarrett's home in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Even Kurt may have known—or suspected—as much. But in July, an anonymous caller dialed in to the *Bubba The Love Sponge* radio show and claimed that Karen and her kids were living with Jarrett.

That call set off a firestorm within TNA. TNA President Dixie Carter was reportedly furious at Jarrett, who allegedly had denied the relationship previously. Jarrett was sent

home from TNA and did not appear at television tapings or at the Hard Justice pay-per-view. Rumors were swirling that Carter may buy out Jarrett's ownership stock in the company. Whether or not Jarrett returns to the company (and in what capacity) remained to be seen as of press time for this issue.

According to several locker room sources, Angle was furious about the way the situation went down, either because he did not know that Jarrett was dating Karen, or because the story was leaked to a shock-jock, airing Angle's dirty laundry for all the world to see.

It's also not known when this alleged relationship began. Angle has publicly insinuated that he suspected his wife had been having an affair while she was working at TNA. Whether or not that was true, Jarrett carrying on a secretive relationship with his co-worker's ex-wife creates the appearance of impropriety.

As an authority figure in TNA, Jarrett must hold himself to a higher moral standard. Jarrett has allowed a personal relationship to cause a deep rift in TNA, as the fallout between Jarrett and Kurt has led to the locker room "taking sides," with some wrestlers loyal to Kurt and some loyal to Jeff.

For a man who preaches about team and loyalty in TNA, Jarrett committed a terrible transgression. He was dishonest, and he engaged in a romantic relationship with a subordinate's ex-wife.

In his defense, we have yet to hear Jarrett's side of the story, and an anonymous caller on a talk show stirred up the entire imbroglio. But Jarrett should have been smart enough to avoid getting himself into a situation like this. Jarrett made a bad decision, and he's in danger of losing the thing he worked so hard to create in TNA.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Put pleasure before business



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



When exactly did the Hogans turn into the Osbournes? That's right, as in Ozzy, Sharon, and their two creepy kids. Okay, maybe Hulk, Linda, Brooke, and Nick never seemed like the perfect all-American family, but their image was fairly clean. Nowadays, we're not so sure Ozzy and Sharon wouldn't be offended by our comparison.

We shouldn't be so flippant about all this, as for the second straight year, Hulk Hogan has been given a Turnbuckle Turkey largely for a very serious, very offensive, and very disappointing choice of words. If you haven't been paying attention, Hogan's wife, Linda, filed for divorce in 2007 after nearly a quarter-century of marriage. Hulk said from the start that he was stunned. Things got very ugly in a hurry, as the WWE Hall of Famer and undisputed all-time great of the sport was angered when he saw what he apparently was going to lose in the divorce proceedings to Linda and in turn maybe to the man she was dating, a man who was younger than his daughter. So here is what he told *Rolling Stone* magazine this spring: "I could have turned everything into a crime scene like O.J., cutting everybody's throat. You live half a mile from the 20,000-square foot home you can't go to anymore, you're driving through downtown Clearwater [Florida] and see a 19-year-old boy driving your Escalade, and you know that a 19-year-old boy is sleeping in your bed, with your wife ... I totally understand O.J. I get it."

Even in a moment of extreme anger and frustration, Hulk Hogan (anyone, for that matter) should have enough sense not to identify with one of the most notorious and reviled criminals of this generation, even if former NFL star O.J. Simpson was ultimately acquitted in the grisly 1994 murders of his ex-wife, Nicole, and her friend Ronald Goldman.

Predictably, Hulk and his spokespeople backpedaled almost immediately, using the age-old of excuse of comments being taken out of context.

"I spent three days with a writer for *Rolling Stone* talking about being positive and happy and walking in the spirit of Christ. And he asked

me, 'Well, why didn't you flip out?'" he told TMZ.com "Well, I didn't jump off the Empire State Building, I didn't buy a white Bronco. I didn't do the O.J. Simpson thing. I took the high road. I'm not focused on Linda anymore."

Sorry, but those comments are despicable no matter the context. It conveniently takes us back to last year, when we gave him a Turnbuckle Turkey for his handling of son Nick's incarceration on felony reckless driving charges. Then, too, he said some stupid things. We remember him appearing contrite on *Larry King Live* in a desperate attempt at damage control again. Well, here we are again.

Considering the whole messy Hulk-Linda divorce, Nick's problems with the law (remember, his felony reckless driving resulted in his passenger ending up in a persistently vegetative state), and Brooke's transformation from aspiring clean-cut young pop singer to someone who makes titillating appearances on Howard Stern's radio show and gleefully shares too many details of her sex life, well, what can we say? This entire family is in desperate need of an image makeover ... and maybe some extended time out of the spotlight.



Can't keep his foot out of his mouth



Photo by Matt Roberts



As Ric Flair's son, one would have to expect that Reid Flair would engage in a little bit of hell-raising and wild partying. But, in reality, the conduct the 21-year-old has displayed outside of the ring bears little resemblance to anything his father ever did.

We typically like to have fun with these Turnbuckle Turkey awards, but there's nothing funny about Reid's behavior. Reid has been arrested three times within the past two years, with the most serious charge being for possession of heroin.

Reid was arrested on April 28 after crashing his car, just one month after a prior arrest for driving while impaired. His license was revoked after that arrest, so this time he was charged with driving with a suspended license. When police examined the car, they claim to have found black tar heroin in the car.

Heroin is an extremely dangerous and addictive drug. It can destroy lives and render users unable to function without the drug.

Reid has had previous brushes with the law as well. He was charged with assault and battery in 2007. He also had an assault charge in 2005 as a juvenile.

There is a clear and troubling pattern to Reid's behavior. As the son of one of the greatest (and most successful) wrestlers of all-time, Reid grew up in the lap of luxury. His father had money, and Reid lived a lifestyle of privilege. A star athlete in high school, Reid became a national wrestling champion, building a celebrity aura of his own. He wrestled his first pro match when he was just 10 years old, defeating Eric Bischoff on national TV. He was groomed for superstardom in pro wrestling, and wrestled

his first true match in December 2008, teaming with his brother, David, to defeat The Nasty Boys. Both Flair and Hulk Hogan were on hand for that match, which was designed to be Reid's coming-out party.

While Reid certainly has the amateur credentials and a sterling pedigree, it's obvious that he lacks maturity. Driving under the influence, crashing cars, and getting involved with heroin are potentially deadly mistakes. Reid is risking both his own life and the lives of others. This isn't a case of "boys being boys" or Reid trying to live up to his father's infamous hard-partying antics. This is a very clear and glaring sign that Reid has some serious problems that need to be addressed immediately.

One day, Reid just might become a terrific pro wrestler. He might even draw comparisons to his father and collect a world championship or two before he's done. But before Reid can look ahead to future greatness, he needs to address the issues of today. Otherwise, there's a chance he won't survive long enough to achieve anything, inside or outside the ring.



Photo by Matt Roberts

Reid Flair should stick to the ring, not the drugs.



Photo by Matt Roberts



Young Cody Rhodes had better keep looking over his shoulder, and not just because DeGeneration-X or John Cena might be on his tail. His spot in Legacy might not be as secure as he thinks if things work out just so for one famous family.

That would be the family of his very own partner, Ted DiBiase Jr.

Ted Jr. is already the fourth member of his family to make it big in this game. His grandfather, "Iron" Mike DiBiase, actually died in the ring 40 years ago. Ted Jr.'s father, of course, is "The Million-Dollar Man." Many might not know it, but Ted Sr.'s mother, Helen Hild, was a pretty good female wrestler back in the day. She died in 1984.

Ted Jr.'s brother Brett has a WWE developmental deal in his pocket and is currently thriving in Florida Championship Wrestling. The DiBiaes could form their own version of Legacy or some other supergroup all by themselves. And that's even without counting on older brother Mike. Right now, let's just say that they shouldn't be counting on Mike at all. The eldest DiBiase boy, you should know, was third runner-up in the 2007 PWI Rookie of the Year balloting and is a former NWA North American champion (for 17 months!) and former NWA Texas champ. He was stripped of the latter title for skipping a defense.

Which, ironically, gets us to our point—a rather serious point.

Mike DiBiase is the only son of Ted who doesn't have a WWE deal. You would think that just the fact that both his brothers are rising fast in the WWE system would get him a good, long look from the WWE talent department if it hasn't already happened. Maybe several long looks if need be.

Well, his conduct of a few months ago won't help his cause.

Back on March 22, Mike DiBiase was arrested in Huntsville, Texas, when he was caught with property that was allegedly stolen from an

independent wrestling promoter for whom he had wrestled the previous night. The property was found in his vehicle. Clearly, that kind of evidence is pretty damning.

He was booked into the Walker County jail on a charge of theft of property \$500 to \$1,500 but released on bond less than two hours later. He was ordered to appear in court on July 14 to enter a plea.

Here would be his chance to start to defend himself if he is, indeed, innocent.

Instead, DiBiase no-showed the court date, and a warrant for his arrest was issued.

So if you're a higher-up in WWE and you're looking to fortify the developmental roster ... you probably cross one name off the list of possibles, for now anyway.

In the court of public opinion, skipping a key court date when you have been charged with a crime is only slightly less damning than fleeing a crime scene and avoiding the law altogether. Hard to make a case for your innocence after that. Mike DiBiase may or may not be guilty of theft, but he did himself and his career no favors with his actions—or lack thereof—on July 14.



Skipped a title defense ... and a key court date



WORLDWIDE CHAMPIONSHIP
WRESTLING
From



Matt Striker joined the ranks of Vanessa Hudgens, Rihanna, and Paris Hilton when nude photos, apparently of him, were leaked online.

Most likely self-snapped on a cell phone camera, the photos do not show the man's face, but show a man with Striker's build wearing only a bath towel. Other photos show close-ups of the man's genitals.

The pictures appeared online and were reported to be photos the ECW commentator had taken of himself and e-mailed to an unnamed acquaintance. It is unknown whether that acquaintance or a third party is responsible for leaking the photos on the Internet.

Because the photos do not show the man's face, there is a possibility that the pictures are someone other than Striker, yet because of the man's unique physique and features, it is widely believed that the photos are of Striker. Still, that plausible deniability may have saved him from getting into hot water with WWE management. Neither Striker nor WWE has officially issued a comment on the photos, and Striker has not faced any disciplinary action from the company.

Assuming that it is Striker displaying his naughty bits, it shows a colossal failure in judgment for a man who considers himself the smartest man in wrestling.

Striker has to know that private photographs—especially those of celebrities—have a way of ending up on the Internet. As a WWE announcer, he is an ambassador of the company and a role model to the children that comprise a large segment of WWE's audience.

Striker should have known better. He's extremely lucky this scandal hasn't affected his WWE career, though it must have caused considerable embarrassment to him personally. At least we hope Striker was embarrassed. We hope he had the common sense to feel ashamed of himself. He hasn't taken responsibility for the photos or made any sort of public apology. Hopefully, now he'll think twice before sharing personal photos that can come back to haunt him.

We're not prudes here at INSIDE WRESTLING, but Striker's photos (again, assuming they are indeed him) cross the line of decency, especially as WWE is working to present a more family-friendly product.

We're especially disappointed that the former teacher hasn't turned the controversy into a teaching moment. He could apologize for his naiveté in taking these photos and remind WWE fans that photos, comments, and items posted online can come back to have negative consequences. That's what Hudgens and others have done.

We love his commentary, but we've seen a side of Striker we didn't want to see. And to think he used to harass Kelly Kelly for being an exhibitionist.



Striker (left) in a photo we can publish

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Photo by George Napolitano

UMAGA

It has become one of the more creative—albeit very serious—euphemisms in the game today. Surely you know what is meant when wwe.com wishes a wrestler the best in his or her future endeavors.

In the more blunt words of Vince McMahon, “You’re fired!”

Reasons for dismissals typically aren’t provided when WWE releases a wrestler, but more often than not it happens because the company needs to trim the budget and/or Creative just cannot come up with anything intriguing for the wrestler in question.

How frustrating it must be to be fired for such a reason. If you’ve given your best, there isn’t much more you can do. It’s out of your control.

But there are instances in which there is something very tangible a wrestler can do about it to prevent it from happening.

Take the case of Edward Fatu. You knew him as Umaga. “The Samoan Bulldozer.” A monster once presented as virtually unbeatable. A man who only a few months ago still seemed to have a great future ahead of him in this sport. After battling through some injuries, he was moved from Raw to Smackdown, and WWE seemed committed to rebuilding his monster persona. Case in point: He defeated fellow rising star and soon-to-be World champion C.M. Punk impressively at Judgment Day in May.

Suddenly, though, his future became much less certain.

News of his release early this summer took a lot of people by surprise. Then came the explanation. He had just been found to be in violation of WWE’s Wellness Policy for a second time. The first time, WWE suspended him. This time, the company demanded that he enter a drug rehabilitation program.

He refused to do so. And WWE had little choice but to sever ties with him. Seriously, what good would the Wellness Policy do if McMahon heard of Fatu’s refusal and said, “Well, okay, if he really doesn’t want to go, let’s forget about it”?

We don’t know the extent of Fatu’s drug problem or whether he has done something



Photo by George Napolitano

Hell no, he wouldn’t go

about it since being released, but just the fact that he had a second strike on his record was disturbing. That he decided not to do anything about it when a helping hand was extended to him and he was willing to surrender his high-paying job because of that decision was alarming. Considering how many wrestlers have lost their lives over the past few decades as a result of drug abuse and addiction, WWE took this second violation on Fatu’s part very seriously, and rightly so. It cannot afford to be an enabler in a situation like this, no matter what Fatu may have thought and/or said about it and no matter what his position in the company was. Better for anyone to play it safe and go to rehab before what might be a relatively minor problem turns into a major one.

WWE has shown that it will not necessarily give up or turn its back on a wrestler with a drug problem. It has even paid for former stars (X-Pac and Test, for example) to enter rehab. If Fatu shows that he has cleaned himself up, he may yet get another chance. We hope that happens. More importantly, we hope Fatu realizes what a huge mistake he made—and soon.



Photo by George Napolitano

You are, as we are at times, quick to blame the somewhat nebulous "WWE Creative" for bad WWE programming, ill-conceived storylines, disappointing pushes for your favorite stars, utter lack of logic, and so on.

Does that mean the writers, head of Creative Stephanie McMahon, some combination of the two, or something or someone else altogether?

The real answer: someone else altogether.

Boil everything down and Vince McMahon is WWE Creative. He makes the final call on all matters creative and reserves the right to make changes from week to week, day to day, and hour to hour, if not more often. But some things creative are all Vince right from the start.

Witness what happened at what should have been just another edition of *Raw*. Thanks to E. Stan Kroenke, the May 25 version was anything but that. Several months earlier, WWE booked *Raw* for that evening at the Pepsi Center in Denver. It never occurred to Kroenke, the owner of the NBA's usually woeful Denver Nuggets, that his team, which has become quite good, might need that date for a home NBA playoff game.

Well, what do you know? By the time the NBA's Western Conference finals rolled around, his Nuggets did need the building that night to play the Los Angeles Lakers. "Hmmmmmm, um, Vince, about your *Raw* show this Monday night ... we have a slight problem ..."

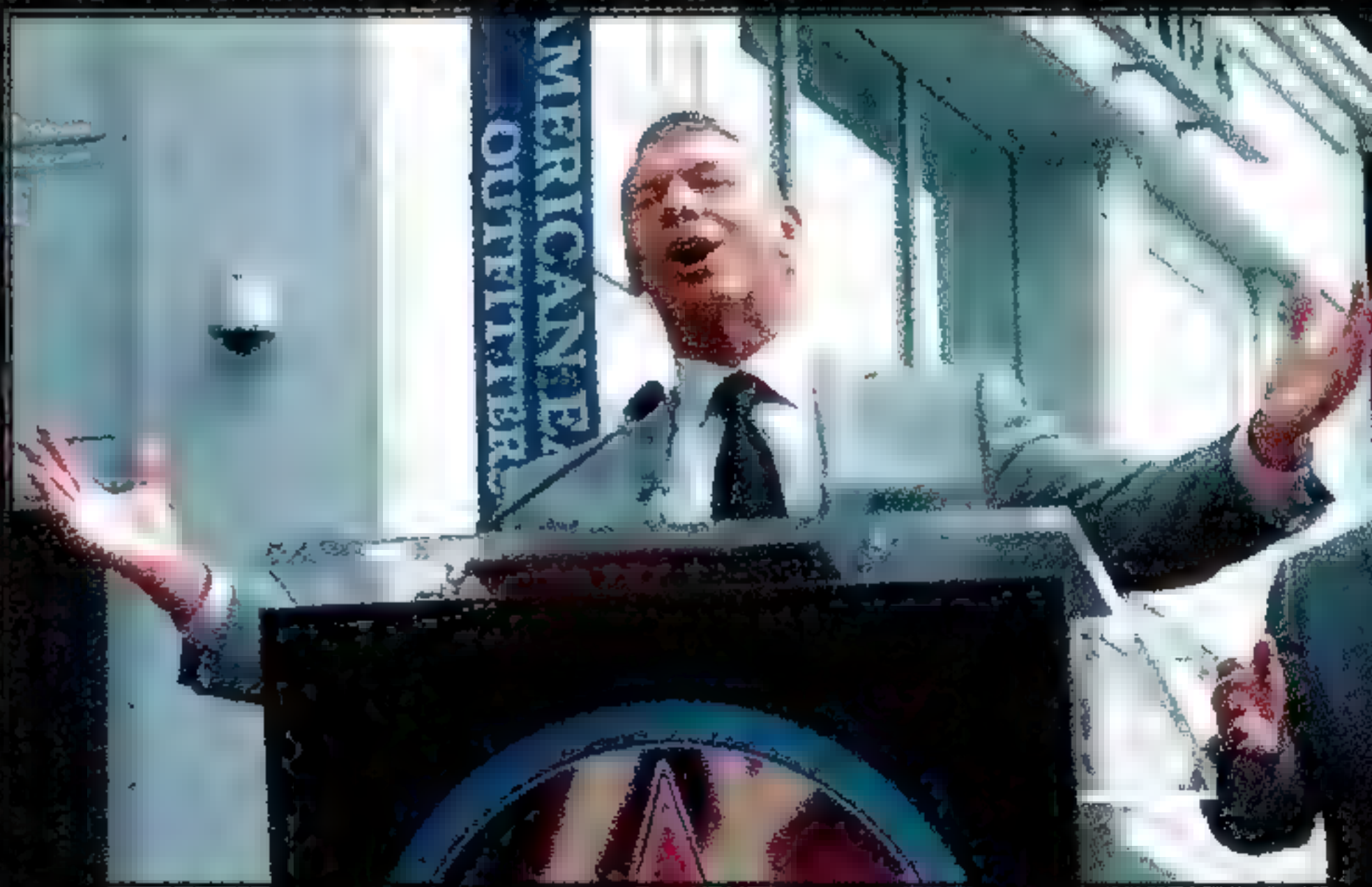
Raw suddenly needed a new home for May 25, and we can't blame him for being angry. Of course, when Vince feels slighted and gets angry, he tends to get very loud and obnoxious. So he proceeded to tell every media outlet that would give him time what a dope and what a terrible owner Kroenke was. It is standard practice for NBA and NHL teams to place holds on their buildings (which bar them from booking other events) for dates that might be needed for playoff games. Thus, McMahon

noted that Kroenke must not have had much faith that his team would advance deep into the playoffs if he didn't follow standard procedure.

That wasn't the end of it. To get back at his evil new arch-nemesis, McMahon hastily had WWE book *Raw* not at a nearby arena, but at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, home of the Lakers. That'll show 'em! Much—far too much, actually—of the show was devoted to lampooning Kroenke (his name is Enos, you know, which rhymes with ...). A fake and clueless Kroenke came out to address the crowd and did what may have been a spot-on impression of the man (hard to say, though, if you've never seen the real thing). Kroenke, of course, was made to look the fool and ended up getting shoved down and humiliated by the WWE chairman.

We also got skits with fake Jack Nicholson (a huge Lakers fan) and others. The main event saw a five-man team of WWE fan favorites wearing Lakers jerseys beat a five-man team of heels sporting Nuggets gear. Imagine how relevant this seemed to fans in, say, Mississippi or Vermont.

Place the blame on Vince for using two hours of *Raw* to settle a personal and meaningless grudge, but we seem to always have a "Turkey" for him. In this case, Kroenke started it and failed to rectify it. So we'll let him have it all to himself.



Kroenke made Vince cranky

Photo by Shane M. Kildner



Photo by NBAE/Getty Images

Let's start by saying that comedian Jimmy Graham's remarks were unfunny and offensive. That being said, that still didn't give Scott Hall a free pass to grab him by the throat, cut an expletive-laced promo, and interrupt a comedy roast of The Iron Sheik.

Graham was one of several members of a panel on hand to roast The Iron Sheik at an event in October 2008, when one of his jokes struck a raw nerve and set off Hall.

"After the Sheik and Hacksaw Jim [Duggan] got caught sniffing coke in the parking lot, his career fell faster than Owen Hart," Graham cracked.

Personally, we can't see anything remotely funny about a man falling to his death in a horrific accident, and it was a lousy joke at best. Hall, however, was incensed by the remark and stormed the dais. He pushed the podium out of the way, grabbed Graham by the throat, and forced him up against the wall. After Hall was separated from the comedian by security, an apparently inebriated Hall took a microphone and slurred insults at Graham and praise of Hart. He then shook the hand of The Iron Sheik and walked off stage. But instead of leaving, a belligerent Hall stood in the back of the room, making crude gestures and crotch chops and shouting at Graham as fellow attendees King Kong Bundy, Kevin Sullivan, and Nikolai Volkoff tried to restore order.

Just when it looked like things had settled down a bit, Hall re-entered the room and again had to be escorted out by security.

While Graham's joke was tasteless, Hall's reaction was both overblown and embarrassing. He had no business storming the stage, and he certainly had no right to physically accost Graham. A roaster's job is to be edgy. Graham



Walking on the Razor's Edge of life with his actions

stepped over the line.

Hall could have stood up and voiced his displeasure. He could have booed. He could have left the room until Graham had finished his set. All of those actions would have displayed his displeasure in a more appropriate manner.

But Scott Hall is Scott Hall, and that means he's probably not going to handle things in an appropriate manner.

The underlying issue here is Hall's drinking, which short-circuited his wrestling career and has resulted in numerous brushes with the law. He has made inappropriate comments to women, missed bookings, and generally ruined his life

because of his drinking. In a recent interview in *Newsday*, Hall's longtime friend Kevin Nash basically threw up his hands in helplessness, saying, "I've tried. Everybody's tried. But as much as you want somebody to live a sober life, unless they want to, it's just not going to happen ... [Alcoholism] is absolutely a disease and it has to be treated as a disease. And, you know, some people don't make it from a disease."

Hall addressed the roast incident in an interview with 1wrestling.com the day after the event. "I'm a little too old to be changing my ways now," he said. "[Graham's] lucky he didn't get his ass whipped. I would have went to jail about it, because that's how pissed I was."

There's nothing wrong with being offended, but Hall has to learn that real life is different from pro wrestling. Attacking someone you disagree with doesn't fly in the real world. Instead of claiming he's too old to change, he needs to get sober and come back to reality.



Photos by Vern Yerna

Some champions might spend the day before a pay-per-view title defense doing some light conditioning, watching videotape, or resting. The day before Hard Justice, TNA World champion Kurt Angle was served some hard justice of his own, spending nine hours in the Allegheny County Jail.

According to police reports, Angle had been living in Moon Township, Pennsylvania, with Trenesha Biggers, also known as Rhaka Khan, despite both claiming they had previously ended their relationship. In early morning on August 15, Biggers applied to police for a protection from abuse order after an alleged altercation with Angle.

Police arrived at Angle's home and escorted him away from the premises. Angle left to find a hotel. About two hours later, Biggers called police from a Starbucks, claiming that Angle had circled the parking lot several times, staring at Biggers as she was seated outside.

Police arrived to find Angle on the scene. A subsequent search of Angle's vehicle yielded a syringe and two vials of human growth hormone, which Angle maintained had been prescribed for him to treat neck injuries.

Angle was arrested and charged with harassment, drug possession, and driving with a suspended license (his license was suspended following a DUI charge in 2007). Angle was held for nine hours before being released on bail and was able to get to Orlando in time for the pay-per-view, where he successfully defended his title against Sting and Matt Morgan.

Angle's arrest is the latest in a string of erratic behavior from the former Olympic champion. In 2006, he was released by WWE due to "personal issues," which Angle has subsequently described as an addiction to painkillers. He has frequently made controversial statements in interviews, taking shots at both Vince McMahon and Jeff Jarrett. He was arrested for DUI in 2007, divorced in



Says she was menaced by the champ

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

2008, and most recently made threats toward Jarrett, stemming from Jarrett's relationship with his ex-wife, Karen.

Angle is in danger of letting his personal issues overshadow a Hall of Fame wrestling career. He's exposing himself as a hothead and a hypocrite. Angle is 40 years old and, if Biggers' allegations are true, he acted like a spoiled high school kid after getting dumped by his first girlfriend.

Angle painted himself as the victim in the Jarrett/Karen situation and tried to leverage the situation to drive Jarrett out of power and gain more political power backstage. While Jarrett's relationship with Karen was ill-advised, at least Jarrett didn't get in trouble with the law or be accused of stalking someone.

Angle came off looking like a fool and a bully. Worse, he jeopardized TNA's pay-per-view, as his arrest left the company scrambling in case he was unable to make it to Orlando for the show.

A part of this Turnbuckle Turkey award should also go to TNA management, who failed to remove Angle from the card. While we understand the company not wanting to rush to judgment, it probably would have been wise to step back and get a firm grasp of the situation before allowing him to defend its most important title so soon after the incident.



Photo by Lee South /TNA Wrestling

This one was difficult. Sometimes the line between doing what is entirely justified and doing what is right is so thin that it is almost undetectable. Asking a man to make that distinction in the midst of a heated moment is almost asking the impossible.

Nevertheless, Austin Aries made what could have been a colossal mistake in just such a situation.

As it turned out, it could serve as a valuable lesson to Aries, his fellow competitors, and maybe all of Ring of Honor.

The incident took place on December 26 in Philadelphia. Aries had just completed a grueling match and was headed for the dressing room area. Adrenaline was still flowing. Sweat was still oozing. Maybe security was a little lax.

Suddenly, he was shoved and slapped by an overzealous and foolish fan. It was at that instant that Aries acted before thinking. He did what you might expect him to do, what you might have done: He punched back. It was ugly.

Fortunately, despite some posturing and hints of a lawsuit on the fan's part, nothing much ultimately came of it. But think of what could have happened. Three possibilities:

- The fan could have ended up getting seriously injured had he simply fallen awkwardly and landed on, say, his head. Aries would have been blamed.

- The fan could have filed a lawsuit that may or may not have had merit. He may or may not have won the case if it went to trial. If he had won a significant financial settlement, Ring of Honor could have been sunk. This is no billion-dollar company with a team of high-priced lawyers. Even if a lawsuit had been filed but hadn't gone all that far, it could have been another high-profile black mark on the record of professional wrestling as an industry. We all know how the mainstream media loves to hammer pro wrestling, whether justified or not.

- The isolated incident could have escalated into a building-wide riot. Many a riot has started with fisticuffs between just two people. In the

very same city seven months later, what started as a dustup over a spilled drink inside a bar just outside Citizens Bank Park (home of baseball's World Champion Philadelphia Phillies) escalated into a huge brawl involving dozens of people in an adjacent parking lot. It ended with a 22-year-old man being pummeled to death and another beaten badly enough to warrant a trip to the hospital. That second man was reportedly just passing by.

To cite yet another "Philadelphia" example from this summer, Phillies outfielder Shane Victorino was soaked with a beer by a fan as he made a catch in front of the wall inside Chicago's Wrigley Field. Victorino could not have physically reached the fan even if he had wanted to do so. He ultimately did the smart thing in filing a criminal complaint so that the fan could be dealt with by our legal system.

As we said, we are pleased to report that the incident did not become nearly as big a story as even Aries becoming the first two-time ROH champ less than six months after this ugliness transpired. But with ROH growing and becoming more visible, it very easily could have.



Aries put in a no-win situation

Photo by Joe Zanolle



Photo by Scott Finkelstein



STILL BREATHING FIRE!

*Rick "The Dragon" Steamboat's
Improbable Comeback*



BY DAVE LENKER

Rick Steamboat was content to work as a road agent in WWE at the beginning of 2009. But he was thrilled to come out of retirement after 15 years for one big WrestleMania match ... then another ... and now more and more. At times it seems as if he never left.

YOU LOOK FOR the equivalent in another sport—any other sport—and there just isn't one.

Think hockey and maybe one of the all-time greats, Guy Lafleur of the great Montreal Canadiens teams of the 1970s, comes to mind. Lafleur emerged from a four-year retirement in 1988—the year in which he was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame, having won five Stanley Cups, three scoring titles, and two MVP awards—to play three additional seasons for the New York Rangers and Quebec Nordiques, adding a respectable 42 goals to his previous total of 518.

But that was only four years later, and Lafleur was only decent in his comeback.

Boxer George Foreman is a better choice. He had been inactive for a full decade when he returned to the ring in 1987 at the advanced boxing age of 38. In 1994, he knocked out Michael Moorer to become IBF/WBA

heavyweight champion two decades after he lost the title to Muhammad Ali.

But his was only a 10-year hiatus.

This summer, a few months shy of his 60th birthday, Tom Watson nearly authored what some were ready to call one of the most amazing victories in the history of sports when one poor shot on the final hole of the British Open—one of golf's four annual "majors"—cost him his chance to cinch that championship. He would have become the oldest man to win one of those vaunted majors by more than a decade. It would have been unthinkable.

True, it had been more than 25 years since Watson had contended at a major, but he still plays regularly on the Champions (Senior) Tour and occasionally plays on the regular tour. Not really the same as one Rick Steamboat.



Photo by Matt Roberts

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Photo by George Napolitano

Even at age 56, Steamboat has the intensity and fight to tie younger, fresher opponents such as Edge into knots. The thrill Steamboat derives from competing against the best in WWE has spurred an unlikely comeback.

Fifteen years had passed between his last match against Steve Austin in WCW in 1994 and the night of WrestleMania 25. Sure, despite a badly injured back that he suffered during that feud with Austin, he occasionally thought about a comeback. Probably received an offer here and there. Maybe just one big bout for a nice payday.

Surely he could have toured the independent circuit and made a nice little pile of cash competing in some low-impact, low-risk matches that would have disappointed a few of those who reveled in the brilliant athleticism he displayed in his prime.

He always resisted, and as time moved on, he knew it was really over. He had the itch, sure, but ignore an itch long enough and you hardly notice it anymore.

Then he got to know Chris Jericho. If only he hadn't gotten to know that bitter, arrogant, grating, no-good, wonderful, thoroughly inspiring, swell all-around human being Chris Jericho. Talk about your love-hate relationships. Steamboat absolutely hates Jericho, and yet he loves the guy for what he has done for his career. More accurately, he loves him for giving him a career he thought was buried deep in his past.

A half-year later, he's still feuding with Jericho. It's been happening on the house show circuit, so you may not have seen it if the Smackdown crew hasn't set up in a town near you of late. The results have been kind to "The Dragon," too. He has a win over his rival in Greenville, South Caro-

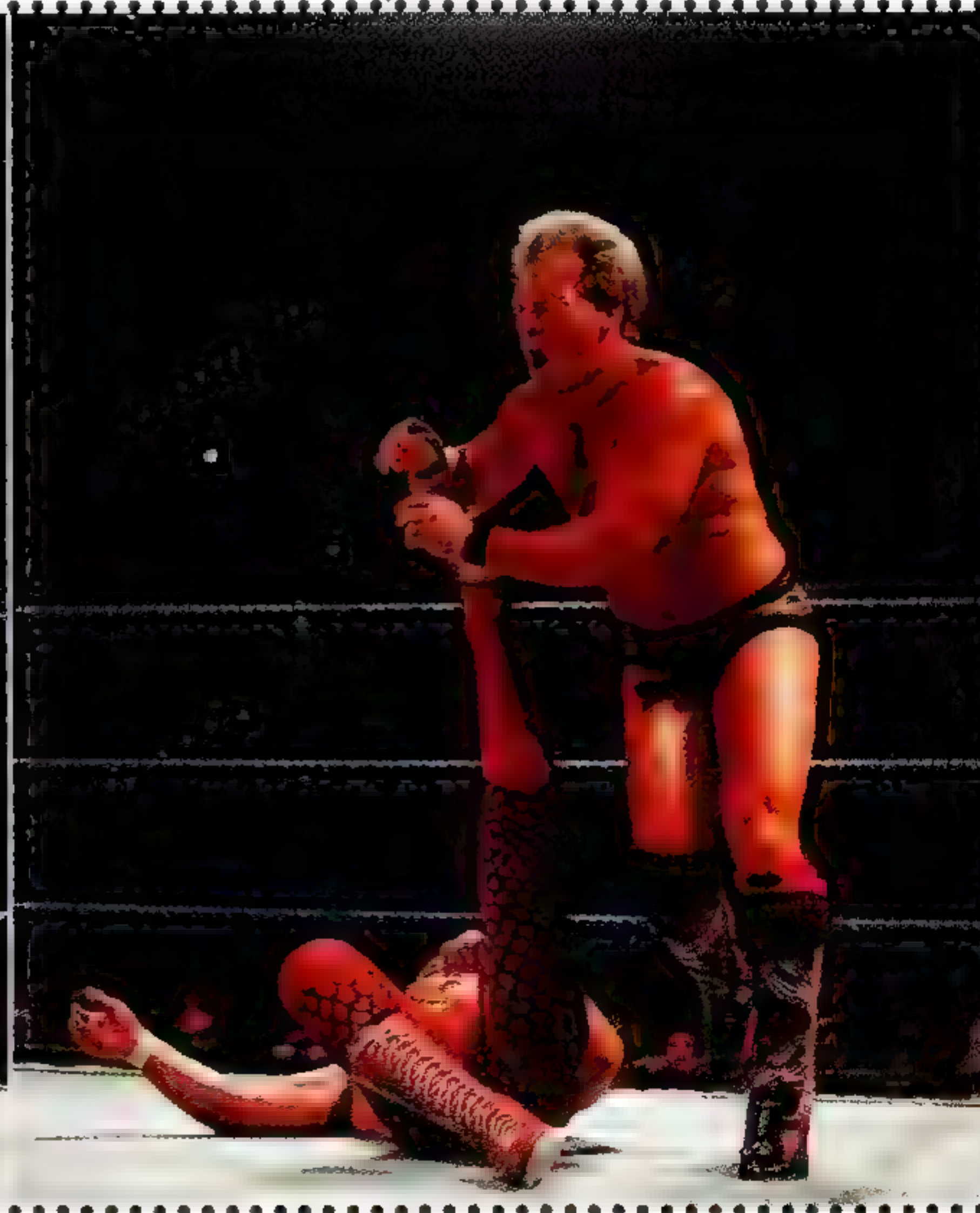
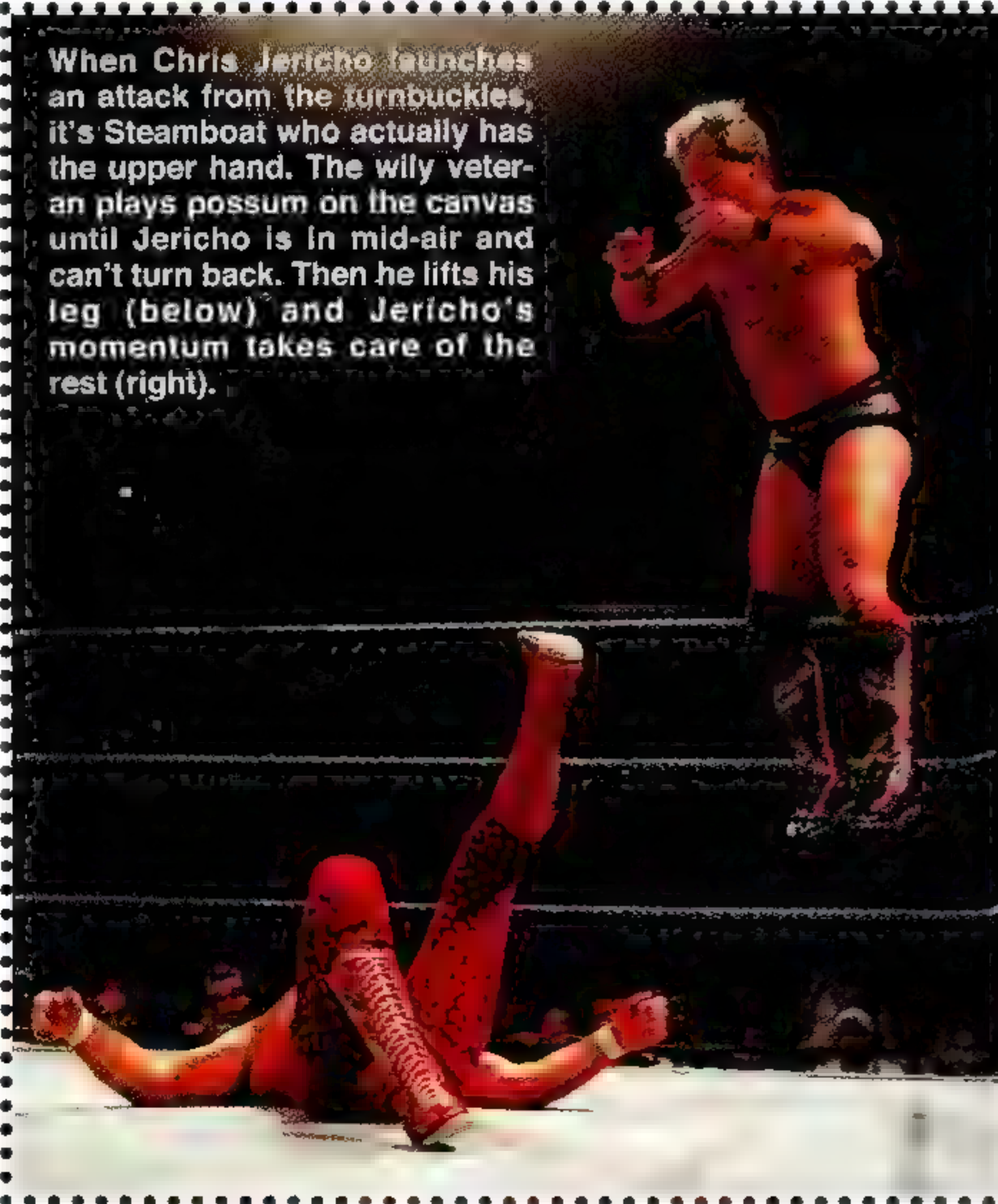
lina, to go with a close loss in Japan. Throw in a few wins over youngsters Sheamus and Drew McIntyre, and, well, "The Dragon" is inching closer to full-time active status and eligibility for *PWI's* Comeback of the Year honors.

He might or might not appear on WWE TV ever again. WWE Creative changes course from week to week, sometimes day to day. The most important thing to him for now is that he feels like a 56-year-old kid again.

"The other day I told some of the guys I feel as nervous before a match now as I did when I was a rookie," said Steamboat, who happened to win the Rookie of the Year Award in 1977. "One of them—I won't say who—told me his grandfather idolized me when he was a kid. I know, very funny. But in all honestly, the adrenaline is flowing now like it hasn't been in a lot of years."

Adrenaline might have explained to an extent his fantastic showing in the gauntlet match at WrestleMania 25 that Jericho provoked by insulting legend after legend for what seemed like months on end. Jimmy Snuka and Roddy Piper seemed to be just passing time and building suspense when they were battling Jericho first and

When Chris Jericho launches an attack from the turnbuckles, it's Steamboat who actually has the upper hand. The wily veteran plays possum on the canvas until Jericho is in mid-air and can't turn back. Then he lifts his leg (below) and Jericho's momentum takes care of the rest (right).



Photos by Matt Roberts

Photo by George Napolitano



No doubt, younger wrestlers such as Jeff Hardy and Rey Mysterio Jr. enjoyed "The Dragon's" work when he was at his physical peak years ago. Their willingness to tag with him suggests that Steamboat is still effective in the ring.

second, respectively. He dispatched them fairly easily, but everyone was waiting for Steamboat.

Gone were the jet-black locks. In fact, there isn't a whole heck of a lot of hair there at all now. But the ability and charisma were and are still there in abundance. He dusted off the most graceful flying bodypress the sport has ever seen (but hadn't seen in a decade-and-a-half), threw in a nice plancha (did any of us even know that word in 1994?), scoop slam, and an inside cradle that nearly netted him a most unlikely win. Lest anyone think he was just there to get in a few impressive moves and go home, it should be noted that he displayed terrific counter-wrestling and defensive skills in "Skinning The Cat" as Jericho tried to toss him from the ring, reversing the Walls of Jericho, and avoiding a Lionsault.

He ultimately fell victim to the Codebreaker and was pinned, but the itch was intensifying again. It could be ignored no longer.

It should be noted regarding Steamboat's comeback match that this was not a case of a legend returning and letting the current star do all the work and make him look good (see Hogan, Hulk vs. Michaels, Shawn at SummerSlam 2005). Jericho has the talent to do that, but that didn't happen at WrestleMania.

That was supposed to be it for Steamboat's WWE comeback. Then came Backlash and a one-on-one rematch with Jericho. Again, he lost, but again, he looked great. As fans everywhere are reminding him in sing-song fashion, he's still got it. It'll be fun to see where this ride ends ... and when.

"Just enjoy the ride is what I tell myself before every match," he said. "Enjoy wherever it takes me."

Where that will be, no one knows. Another few months maybe? Long enough to get a chance to team with son Ricky Jr. in WWE at some point? All the way to the World championship? Probably not on that last count, of course, but then again ... how likely was this comeback in the first place? □



Photo by George Napolitano

Whether or not Steamboat ends up winning a championship seems irrelevant to him. Right now, he's having too much fun tagging with Cena and battling Jericho to let anything hold him back.

Samoa Joe

"I'm an elite wrestler and I deserve to be in elite company."

LONG RESPECTED BY the fans for his fierce independent streak as well as his intensity in the ring, current TNA X division champion and former World champion Samoa Joe shocked his former supporters when he joined the Main Event Mafia after feuding with the group for much of the last year.

Joe has become more dangerous than ever before. He seems to care little about getting disqualified, so long as he inflicts maximum damage. Following his heel turn, Joe has carried out brutal attacks—sometimes alone and sometimes with the other MEM members—on Sting, A.J. Styles, Christopher Daniels, Hernandez, Homicide, and others. Under Taz' guidance, Joe hasn't only become more vicious, he's also managed to further sharpen his renowned repertoire of suplexes and submission holds.

Even before his full-fledged betrayal of the Frontline, there were disturbing signs that Joe's already sadistic persona was getting more pronounced. Proclaiming himself the executive and executioner of a "Nation Of Violence," Joe took on a more severe and aggressive look, donning Samoan tribal war paint, brandishing a hunting knife, and delighting in the torture of his enemies. He has also become something of a mercenary, explaining that he joined the Mafia for the money that former Survivor winner Jenna Morasca invested in the villainous group.



"Deep down people want to support a winner, and I've proven time and time again that's what I am."

Something else that has changed about Joe is his demeanor out of the ring. Even during previous heel stints, he would lose the glower when he wasn't cutting a promo or hitting the ring for a match. Lately, the good-natured jibes and dry, self-effacing humor that made him a wrestling media favorite and helped contribute to him winning the 2006 **PWI** Most Popular Wrestler award have been replaced by a perpetual scowl and a more serious outlook.

Recently, Joe spoke with Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer to discuss the more violent direction his career has taken.

Q: Joe, a lot has happened since you won the TNA World cham-

pionship. A lot of people think the pressure of being the champion had a permanent effect on the attitude you've displayed ever since. Is that a fair assessment?

A: To a degree, yes. I've always embraced a very aggressive style in the ring, but there were times I held back in terms of getting involved in other people's matches. What I found out, though, was you need to be on one side or another in this business. There's a winning side and there's a losing side. When you're by yourself, you're almost guaranteed to wind up on the losing side eventually.

Q: Didn't you have allies in the Frontline? Weren't the fans on your side?

A: With the Frontline, I still felt very much on my own. I saw first-hand how disorganized and selfish the so-called fan favorites were. All you have to do is look at the success of the Main Event Mafia—the dominance we've had over the belts in TNA. I'm an elite wrestler and I deserve to be in elite company. There's no pretense of friendship in the Main Event Mafia, and I prefer that. We're here to win, plain and simple. As far as the fans go, deep down people want to support a winner, and I've proven time and time again that's what I am. If someone doesn't want to support that, well, too bad.





"No matter what title I hold, I'm going to keep stalking and hunting down anyone in my path."

Q: Congratulations are in order for winning your fourth X division title. You don't seem to be getting much happiness out of it, though.

A: Why should I? I'm long since past the point where just winning a belt gives me satisfaction. I'll tell you something I haven't said before: I regret the way I handled my TNA World championship reign. I've always enjoyed being the hunter. When I won the big belt, I let myself become the hunted because I



The evidence that Samoa Joe doesn't have a happy-go-lucky side anymore is very clear. Ever since joining up with the Main Event Mafia, Joe has been nothing but business in the ring. Here, his victim is Homicide.

was too concerned with making sure I kept the title. I promised myself that I'd never be the hunted again. That's what the "Nation Of Violence" is all about to me. No matter what title I hold, I'm going to keep stalking and hunting down anyone in my path. If there's a setback along the way, that's fine so long as I'm the last one standing.

Q: Let's talk about your alliance with Taz. I don't know what role he will be playing now that he's the *Impact* color commentator, but what has he done to bring out your more aggressive side?

A: Taz has been terrific. We've always been very like-minded in our approach to the ring. He's a guy I've admired for years and years, going back to his ECW days, and he's someone I truly respect. You know what I like about him? He's a no-nonsense, no B.S. guy. You always know where you stand with him, and the observations he makes are worth listening to, unlike some other people I could name.

Q: Are you referring to the disastrous relationship you had with Kevin Nash as your adviser?

A: I'm not going to go into my working relationship with Nash except to say that we have an understanding nowadays. We work for the same goals in MEM and any differences we've had in the past have been put aside. I'm happy for him that he regained the Legends championship after a lot of people wrote him off. At any rate, I wasn't comparing Taz to Nash. I was referring to so-



The "Nation Of Violence" has been unleashed upon TNA. Joe wants to inflict fear upon all. Never again will he be the hunted, whether he has a title or not.

called allies in TNA who were supposedly trying to help me out but were only holding me back.

Q: One goal the Main Event Mafia hasn't succeeded in has been to take out Sting. How big of a threat is the former MEM leader to your group.

A: He's a threat, but we've got him outgunned. On a one-on-one basis, Sting is still capable of beating any one of us on a given night, including myself. But when you look at his leadership of the Mafia compared with [Kurt] Angle, look at his age and compare the strength of our entire group to him pretty much working alone these days, I think the answer is pretty clear that he can't win. I know what it's like to be isolated. I've always done it by choice. But understand there's only so much one person can do against a powerful group like the Main Event Mafia.



Joe knows a thing or two about going it alone, but he always chose to do just that. He says now that Sting has no one at his side, he is no match for the MEM as a whole.



"There's only so much one person can do against a powerful group like the Main Event Mafia."

Q: A lot of fans were surprised to hear you say that money was a major factor in you joining the Main Event Mafia. You've never really positioned yourself as a mercenary before. Why the change?

A: There is no change. Look, we're all in this business to make as much money as possible. Anyone who says he'd wrestle for free is a liar. If that were the case, there'd be no need to deal with the travel and wear-and-tear of wrestling around the world. Being associated with the Main Event Mafia has financial benefits to me, and I was honest enough to say that. I'm not obsessed with money, but it's as important to me as it is to everyone else. The fact that people can't handle that sort of honesty isn't my concern.

Q: Which goal is more important to Samoa Joe: Keeping the TNA World championship within the Main Event Mafia—even if Angle or another member holds it—or eventually regaining it yourself?

A: I don't see those goals as mutually exclusive. Are you asking if I'd challenge Angle or another Main Event Mafia member for the title in the near future?

Q: Yes.

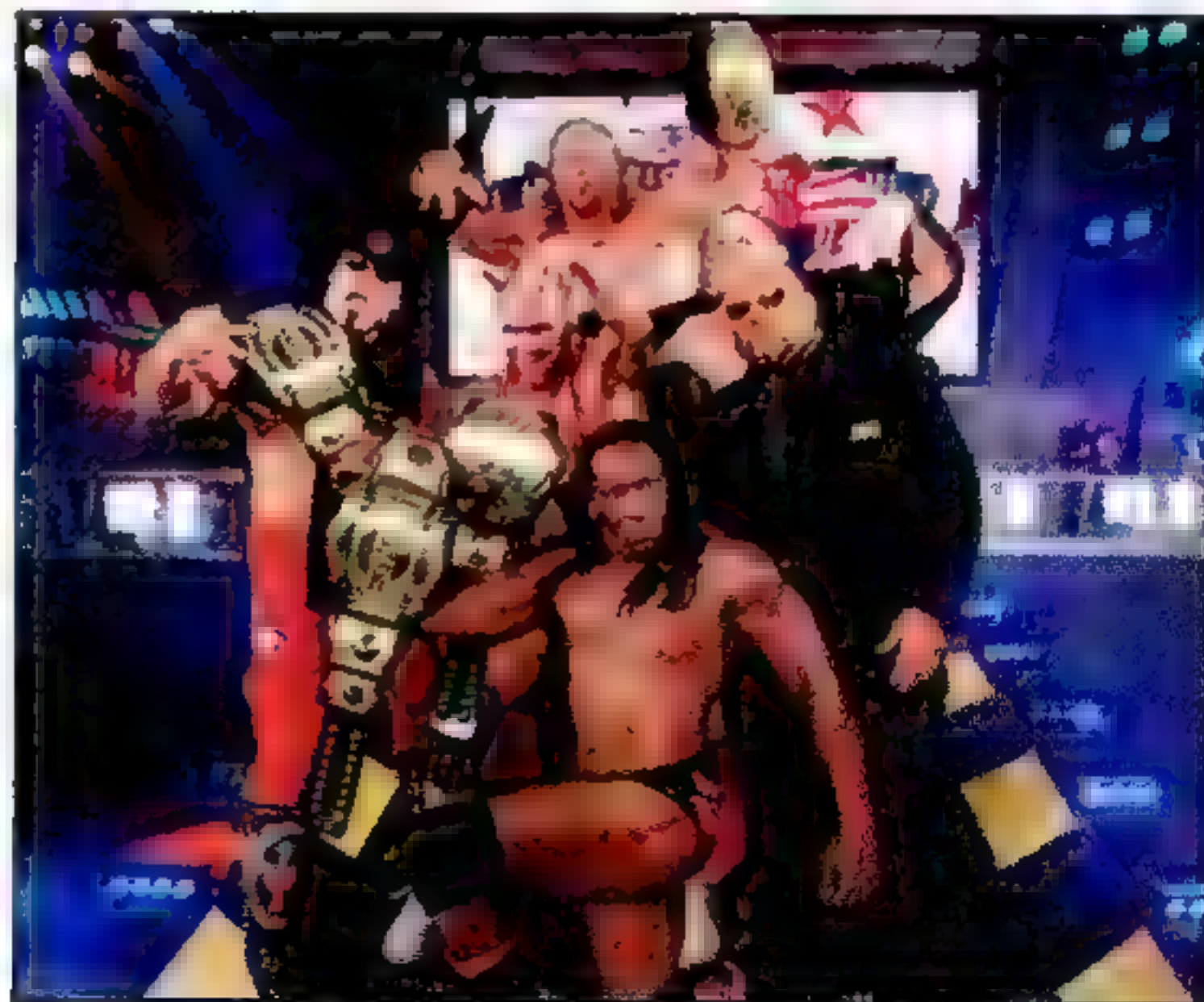
A: I don't see the need to do that right now. For us to beat up on each other only plays into our enemies' hands. But that doesn't mean I'm content to just sit around and take a backseat to Angle or anyone else. Kurt knows that, and he knows that no one can reign forever with a title belt. I respect his leadership of the Main Event Mafia because he's on the same page as the rest of us. As long as we're all moving forward together, it doesn't matter which one of us has which title. In the long run, though, I'm not about to just step out of the World championship picture.

Q: Are you saying your alliance with Angle and the Main Event Mafia is temporary?

A: Every alliance in wrestling is temporary, Bill. Some are just longer lasting than others. Right now, I couldn't be happier with my choice to join the Main Event Mafia, and as long as that's the case, there's no need to make any changes.

Q: One last thing. When we've interviewed you in the past, you've usually been very relaxed and in good humor no matter what else was going on with your career. Is that side of Samoa Joe gone forever?

A: I'm someone who's serious when I need to be serious. It was time for Samoa Joe to make a statement that I intend to stay on top of this business for a long time to come. I think the message has been sent loud and clear. □



Few expected Joe to join with MEM. Even fewer would have guessed money would be the reason. But even Joe admits that the rest of the MEM would be foolish to think he wasn't planning on going after the World title eventually, even if it is already in MEM possession.

What Effect Will TNA's Current Turmoil Have On The Company?

"Dixie Carter's apparently furious with [Jarrett]. Kurt Angle reportedly wants to tear him to shreds. And if anybody can do that, Kurt can. Without Jarrett in the ring and behind the scenes, TNA is a ship without a captain."

—Brady Hicks

RECENT REVELATIONS of backstage scandal and betrayal at TNA have overshadowed even the most outrageous of the company's on-camera feuds. Wrestling fans were stunned by statements made by an anonymous caller to the July 15 edition of the *Bubba The Love Sponge* radio show, who insisted his voice be digitally masked, fearing recriminations for leaking sensitive information. That information, which appears to be verified, was that Karen Angle and Kurt's two young children were living with TNA VP

Jeff Jarrett. TNA President Dixie Carter was reportedly furious and gave Jarrett's some "personal time" off. Rumors hint that Kurt Angle is using the situation to vie for political and creative power within the organization. It's a situation made ever more complicated by misinformation, conjecture, hearsay, and fractious partisanship among TNA staff and talent. The big question is: How will TNA weather the storm of controversy? In an effort to examine all the ramifications of the recent developments, *PWI* Publisher Stu Saks recently summoned some of



When the Angle-Jarrett controversy became public, TNA executives quickly removed Jarrett from TV and live events. However, that reaction has negated a juicy storyline TNA could have used to its advantage.

his editorial staff to a brainstorming session in the main boardroom of the magazine's office. The following is a transcript of that lively debate among Saks, Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda, and contributing writers Brady Hicks and C.F. Hunter.

STU SAKS: Good morning, guys. You're looking suitably bedraggled this Monday morning.

BRADY HICKS: Ugh. We all played an awful game while watching the Victory Road pay-per-view last night.

C.F. HUNTER: Yeah—take a drink every time Don West hollers at the top of his lungs. Bad, bad idea.

FRANK KREWDA: We figured a few drinks might help us figure out the crazy stuff that's going on with TNA right now. There were obviously some last-minute changes made to the show because of all the nasty politics backstage.

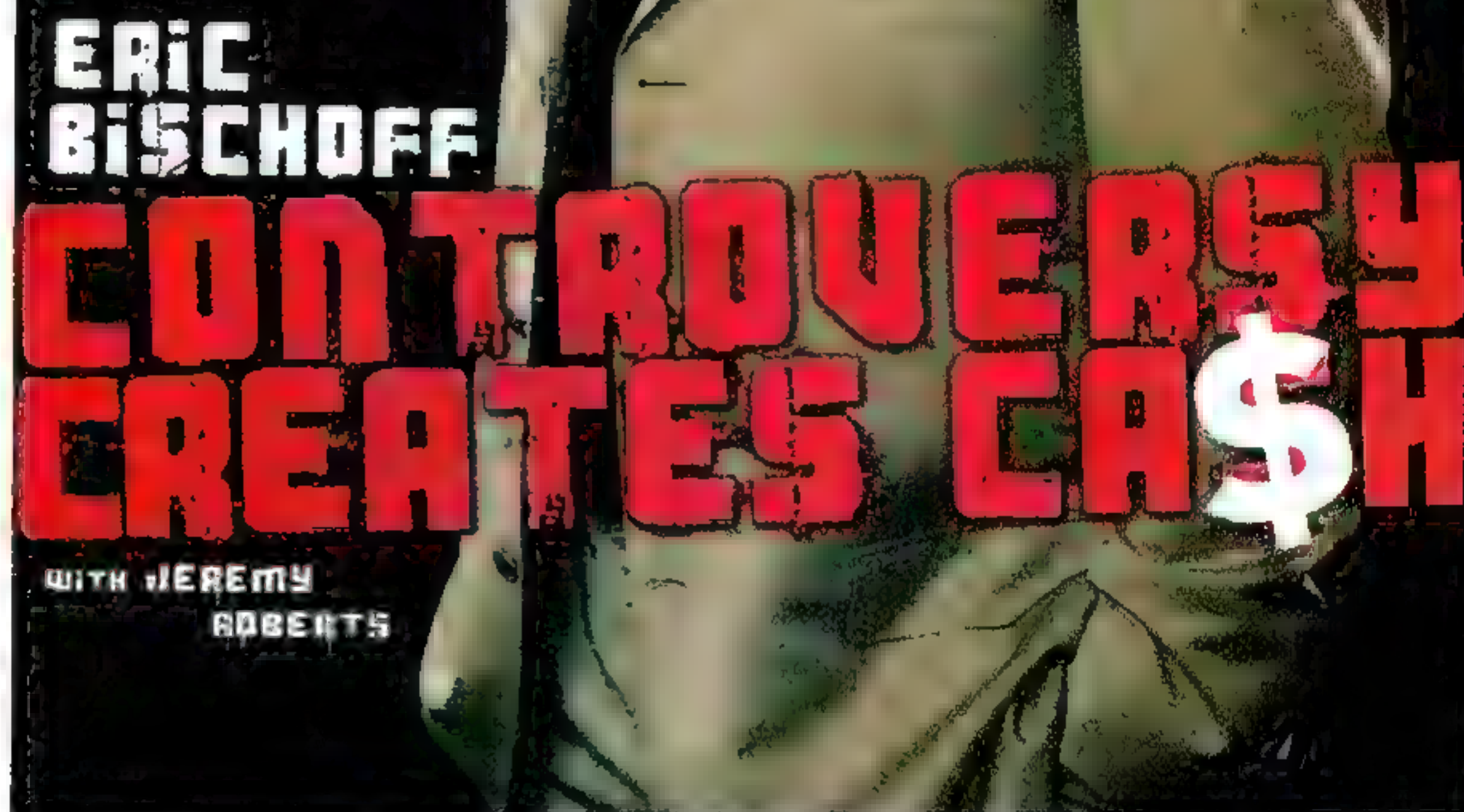
SAKS: Well that's why I've called you into this meeting. We've all heard the clip of the mysterious caller to the radio show. We've all heard the stories of flaring tempers, dangerous liaisons, and inter-office power plays. The question I put to you is this: How will the TNA product be affected? Can the company survive this calamity? Can it thrive because of it? Brady, now that you've had some coffee, let's start with you. What does this controversy mean for the future of TNA?

HICKS: Doom. Game over. They're done-for.

HUNTER: What?

HICKS: Think about it. Jeff Jarrett, the literal and figurative king of the TNA mountain, has apparently been suspended—or has gone on "personal leave" or whatever they want to call it. Jarrett is TNA.

Eric Bischoff might have said it best with his book title, *Controversy Creates Ca\$h*. Both WCW and WWE knew how to incorporate real-life issues into the wrestling product to hook viewers. Perhaps it's time for TNA to follow that example.



Always has been. Dixie Carter's apparently furious with him. Kurt Angle reportedly wants to tear him to shreds. And if anybody can do that, Kurt can. Without Jarrett in the ring and behind the scenes, TNA is a ship without a captain.

HUNTER: You know, Brady, I usually disagree with you, but this time is different.

HICKS: Yeah?

HUNTER: Yeah. Now I really, really, really disagree with you.

HICKS: Oh. I guess I should have seen that coming.

HUNTER: Not only do I think TNA can survive this controversy, I think they can capitalize on it and see unprecedented success because of it.

SAKS: That's interesting. How so?

HUNTER: For starters, who remembers Eric Bischoff's favorite phrase?

KREWDA: "I'm sorry, Vince?"

HUNTER: That's his second-favorite.

KREWDA: I know, just kidding. I assume you mean, "controversy creates cash."

HUNTER: Precisely. When was the last time there was this much buzz about TNA? Sure, Mick Foley's title win echoed through the wrestling world. And, yes, the exploits of the Main Event Mafia boosted ratings thanks to the big-name star power. But nothing has sparked quite as much online chatter as

"I believe [the anonymous caller] knew what I've been arguing all along: A shake-up like this can only help TNA's ratings and profits. Yes, it may bring some temporary pain and embarrassment to the Angle and Jarrett camps, but in the long run it will benefit the company."

—C.F. Hunter

these Jarrett-Angle allegations.

HICKS: But who cares what a bunch of computer nerds are tweeting about online? How does that make money for TNA?

HUNTER: It shows that there is buzz, and where there's buzz there's opportunity for profit. The same people who are chattering online are going to tune in to *Impact* to see how the situation plays out.

SAKS: See how it plays out? Don't you think TNA brass will do their best to keep such things hush-hush and off the airwaves?

HUNTER: Not if they're smart. Keeping things hush-hush may

have worked in the pre-Internet age, when promoters had almost complete control over what information got public.

KREWDA: That's true. Twenty years ago, we never would have heard about this kind of backstage controversy. The business was so guarded before the Internet.

HICKS: Things definitely changed in a big way during the '90s. In fact, I think I know the exact date when those changes really became evident: November 9, 1997. The Montreal Screwjob. That was the moment the curtain was really pulled back on the backstage politics of the wrestling world. Suddenly, Vince McMahon demonstrated that he held all the power—at the expense of one of his most talented superstars.

SAKS: Guys, I think we might be getting off topic.

HUNTER: Not at all, Stu. We're exactly on topic. The Montreal Screwjob is a perfect example of how controversy creates cash. WWE didn't shy away from the controversy. They milked it. Vince McMahon became "Mr. McMahon," arguably the greatest villain in wres-

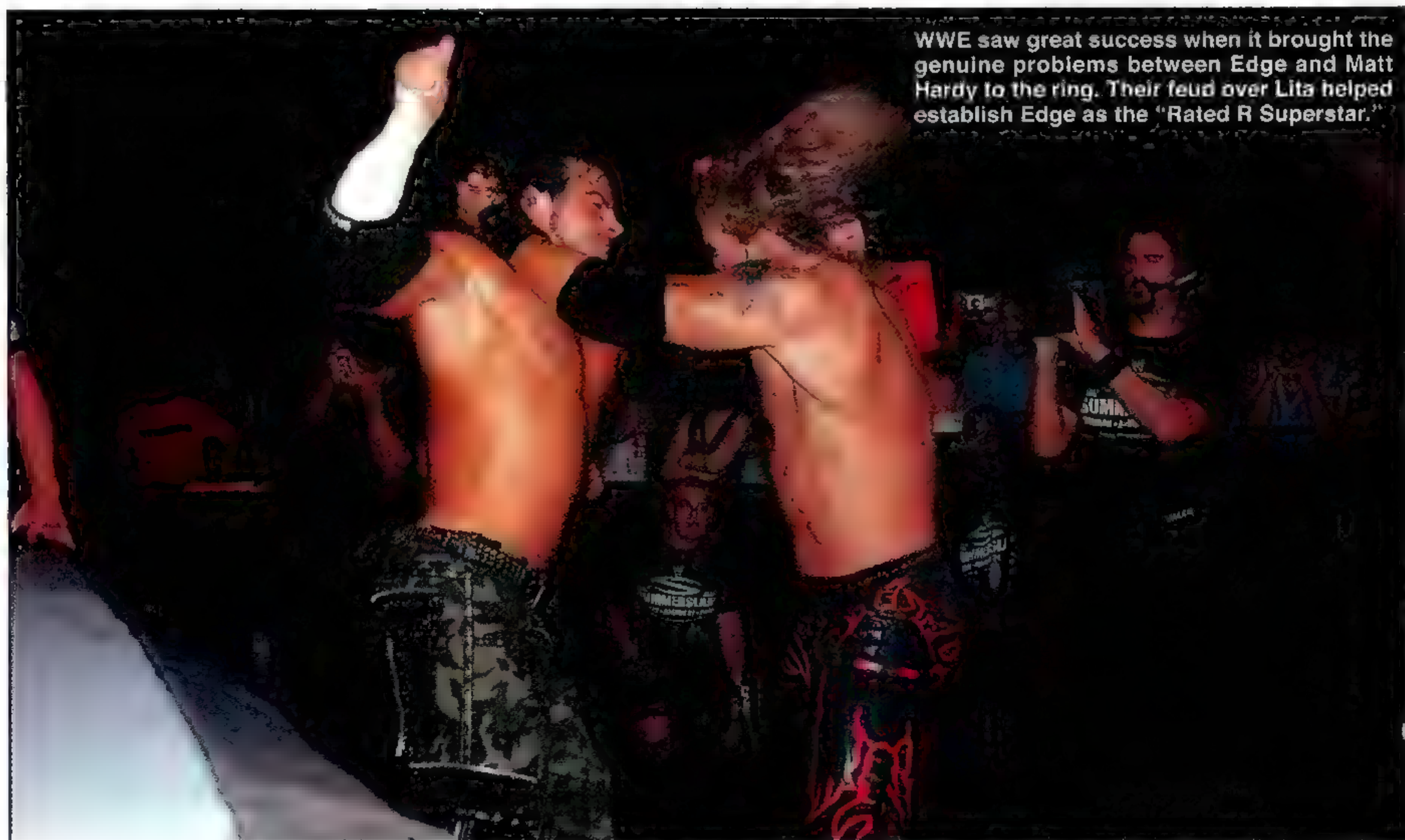
tling history. He turned a real-life backstage fiasco into a hugely entertaining and profitable masterpiece of episodic television.

HICKS: I agree. The contemporary wrestling fan is different than the fan of 20, 30, 40 years ago. Today's fan enjoys the televised product but is also fascinated with the inner workings of the business. Especially when those inner workings are full of intrigue and turmoil.

HUNTER: So, Brady, do you still think TNA's turmoil will spell doom for the company?

HICKS: I still think that, without Jarrett, TNA could suffer. But if Jarrett, Angle, and Dixie can put their personal differences aside and focus on what's good for business, yeah, I think TNA will survive.

SAKS: Brady, I think you might be putting too much emphasis on Jarrett. Let's not forget that Kurt Angle is probably the greatest pro wrestler alive today, and undoubtedly the most significant talent acquisition in TNA's history. If the rumors are true, Kurt is the real "victim" of the controversy. He's almost certainly upset, and likely has some valid grievances with the company.



WWE saw great success when it brought the genuine problems between Edge and Matt Hardy to the ring. Their feud over Lita helped establish Edge as the "Rated R Superstar."



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Although Angle can be viewed as a victim in this controversy, he could end up with an expanded role in TNA, particularly in a behind-the-scenes creative role.

There's speculation that this incident has led Kurt to consider a return to WWE. Can TNA afford to lose Kurt Angle?

KREWDA: From what I've heard, he has actually been using this controversy to jockey for political sway within the TNA office.

HUNTER: I've heard the same thing. But what if we could speak to the anonymous caller from the *Bubba The Love Sponge* show? I bet I know what he was really thinking when he did what he did ...

HICKS: Yeah, right!

SAKS: Finish what you were saying.

HUNTER: Believe it or not, I don't think he was trying to bring harm to TNA. I believe he knew what I've been arguing all along: A shake-up like this can only help TNA's ratings and profits. Yes, it may bring some temporary pain and embarrassment to the Angle and Jarrett camps, but in the long run it will benefit the company.

KREWDA: If the company plays its cards right, that is.

HUNTER: Exactly. The worst thing TNA can do is try to bury this issue. I'm not saying that fans are entitled to know about the personal

lives of wrestlers. They deserve privacy like anyone else.

HICKS: But now that this issue is the hot topic of wrestling blogs and forums ...

HUNTER: There's no sense in pretending it doesn't exist.

KREWDA: Just like Vince McMahon used The Montreal Screwjob to create a despicable caricature of himself.

SAKS: And turned the Edge-Lita-Matt Hardy affair into must-watch TV...

HICKS: And incorporated his real-life relationships with Linda, Stephanie, and Shane into ratings-grabbing television ...

HUNTER: TNA can also turn lemons into lemonade by using this backstage controversy to their advantage.

SAKS: I think we've reached a conclusion, guys. Would it be fair to say that TNA could stand to greatly benefit—in terms of ratings, PPV buys, and all other measures—by being upfront about its behind-the-scenes turmoil and making it part of their programming?

HUNTER: Fair to me.

HICKS: Me, too. But I still believe this could spell disaster for TNA if

they don't do it wisely.

SAKS: Okay, guys, thanks for the input. Now get back to work. This magazine isn't going to write itself. □

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wrestling timeline

JUNE 18, 1995:

Debuts with WCW at The Great American Bash interfering in a match between Arn Anderson and The Renegade.

APRIL 22, 1996:

Captures the WCW World title for a second time by defeating Ric Flair.

AUGUST 26, 1996:

Joins the NWO.

FEBRUARY 8, 1972:

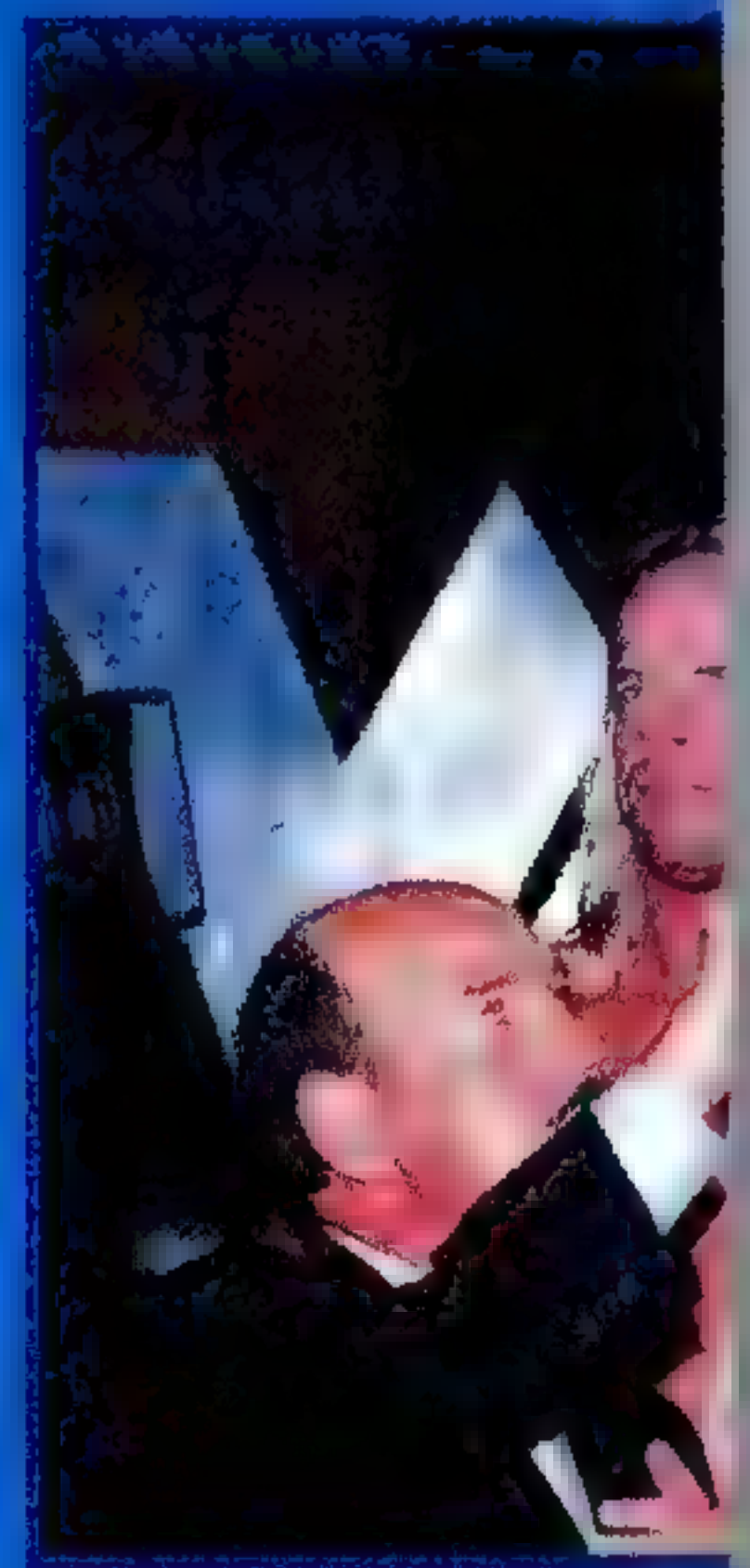
Born in Aiken, South Carolina.

OCTOBER 29, 1995:

Wins WCW World title in first match via disqualification against Hulk Hogan at Halloween Havoc.

AUGUST 8, 1996:

Loses WCW World title at Hog Wild to Hollywood Hogan, leader of the newly formed NWO.



THE BIG SHOW



INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport

DECEMBER 30, 1996:

Demands title shot against Hollywood Hogan and is kicked out of the NWO.

JULY 20, 1998:

Returns to the NWO and wins WCW World tag team title with Scott Hall over Kevin Nash and Sting.

FEBRUARY 9, 1999:

Sigs a 10-year contract with the WWF after WCW contract lapses.

JULY 13, 1997:

Teams with Lex Luger to defeat Hollywood Hogan and Dennis Rodman at Bash at the Beach.

JANUARY 24, 1998:

Suffers serious neck injury at the hands of Kevin Nash at Souled Out pay-per-view.

OCTOBER 11, 1999:

Loses to Goldberg on Nitro in a no-disqualification match.





APRIL 5, 1999:

Tears down TitanTron on episode of *Raw* so that Austin could destroy it.

NOVEMBER 14, 1999:

Captures WWF World title for the first time in triple-threat match win over The Rock and Triple-H at Survivor Series.

JANUARY 21, 2001:

Returns from hiatus to make a brief appearance in the Royal Rumble match.

FEBRUARY 14, 1999:

Debuts with WWF by interfering on behalf of Mr. McMahon in a steel cage match with Steve Austin at Valentine's Day Massacre.

AUGUST 22, 1999:

Wins WWF World tag team title with The Undertaker by defeating X-Pac and Kane at SummerSlam.

APRIL 2, 2000:

Gets eliminated first in 'Fatal Fourway' match for WWF World title at WrestleMania 2000.





FEBRUARY 25, 2001:

Defeats Raven at No Way Out to capture first WWF Hardcore title.

MARCH 25, 2002:

Is drafted by GM Ric Flair to the Raw brand in the annual WWE draft lottery.

OCTOBER 21, 2002:

Is traded by Raw GM Eric Bischoff to the Smackdown brand.

JUNE 28, 2001:

Teams with Mark Henry to defeat Mr. Black and The Prototype (John Cena) in an appearance for Ohio Valley Wrestling.

APRIL 22, 2002:

Briefly joins re-formed NWO.

NOVEMBER 17, 2002:

Accepts assistance from Paul Heyman to defeat Brock Lesnar for the Undisputed title at Survivor Series.



wrestling timeline



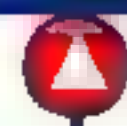
FEBRUARY 23, 2003:

Falls to The Undertaker via submission in a grudge match at No Way Out.



OCTOBER 19, 2003:

Defeats Eddie Guerrero at No Mercy for the U.S. championship.



JANUARY 25, 2004:

Finishes second to Chris Benoit in the Royal Rumble match.

MARCH 30, 2003:

Loses to The Undertaker in a handicap match with A-Train at WrestleMania XIX.



DECEMBER 25, 2003:

Loses to John Cena in a non-title match on the annual *Tribute To The Troops* broadcast from Iraq.

MARCH 14, 2004:

Drops the U.S. championship to John Cena at WrestleMania XX in Madison Square Garden.





JANUARY 30, 2005:

Loses to incumbent champion John Bradshaw Layfield in a three-way match with Kurt Angle for the WWE World title at the Royal Rumble.



JANUARY 8, 2006:

Loses to Triple-H with a broken and casted hand at New Year's Revolution.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2004:

Returns to Smackdown following a long rehabilitation effort after knee surgery.



APRIL 3, 2005:

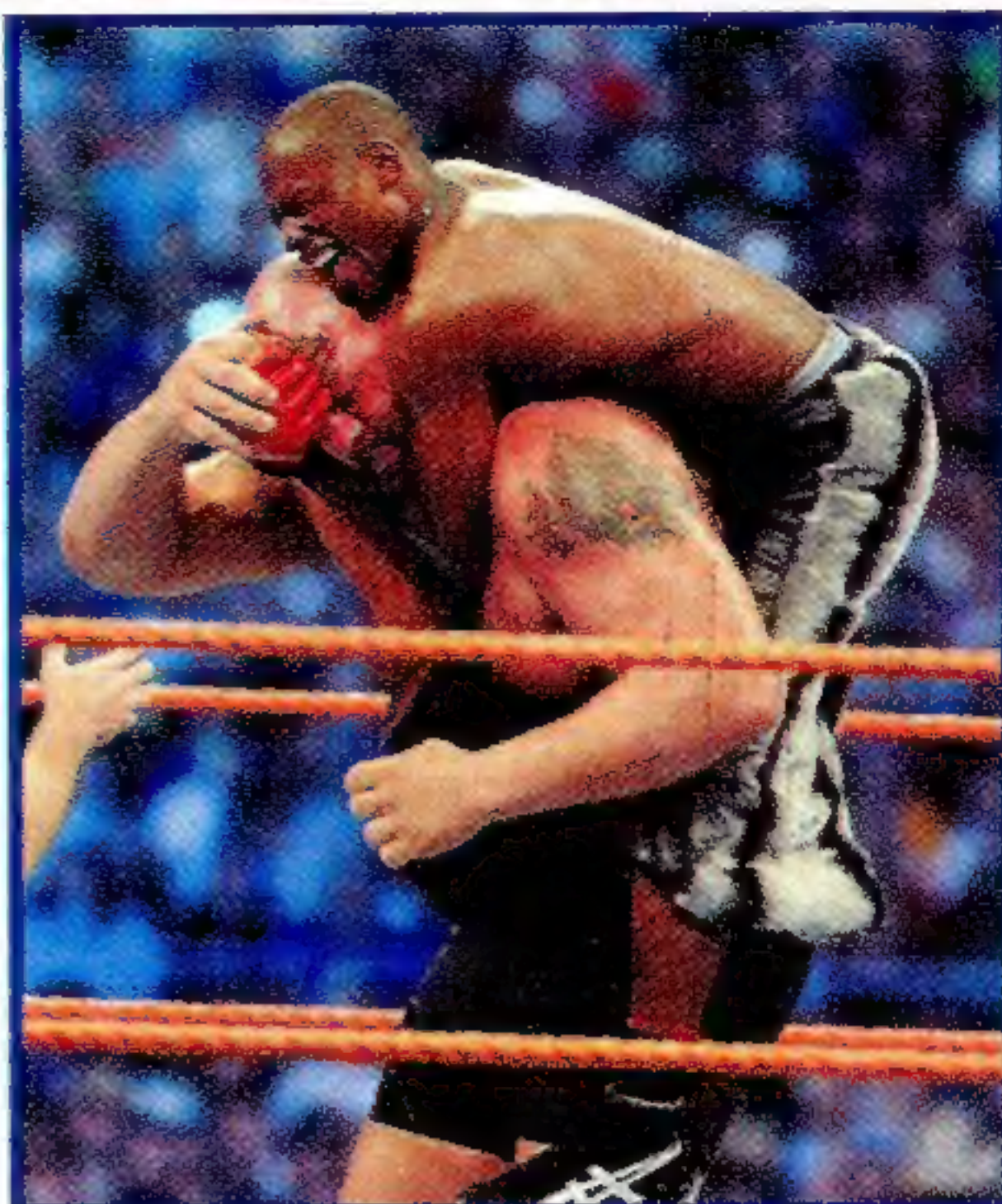
Falls to Akebono in a "Sumo Challenge" at WrestleMania 21.



NOVEMBER 1, 2005:

Teams with Kane to defeat Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch for the WWE World tag team title at Taboo Tuesday.





APRIL 2, 2006:

Retains the World tag team title with Kane by defeating Carlito and Chris Masters at WrestleMania 22.

NOVEMBER 5, 2006:

Competes in "Champion vs. Champion" match at Cyber Sunday against Booker T and John Cena.

MARCH 30, 2008

Loses to professional boxer Floyd Mayweather at WrestleMania 24.

JULY 4, 2006:

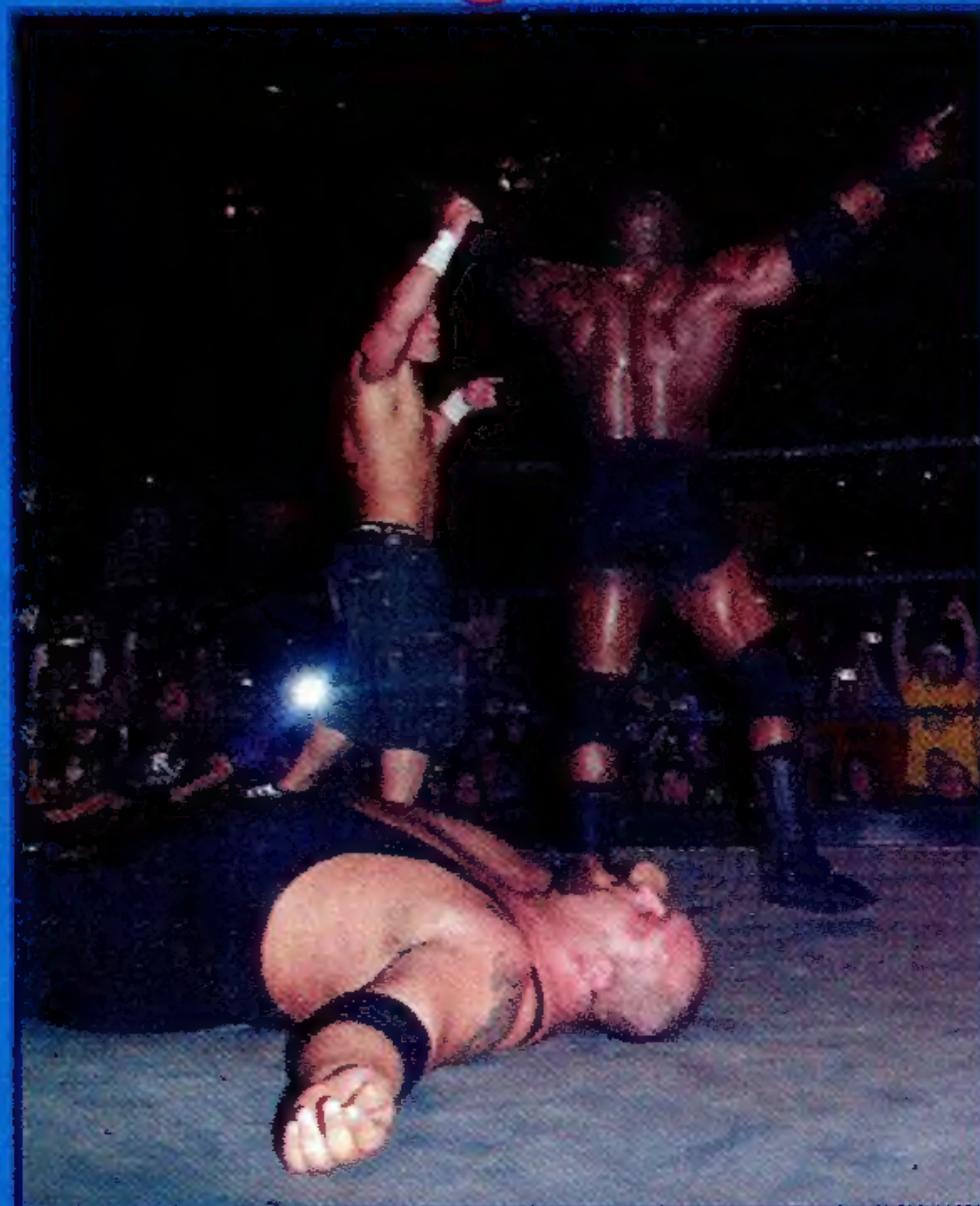
Becomes ECW champion by defeating Rob Van Dam with assistance from Paul Heyman.

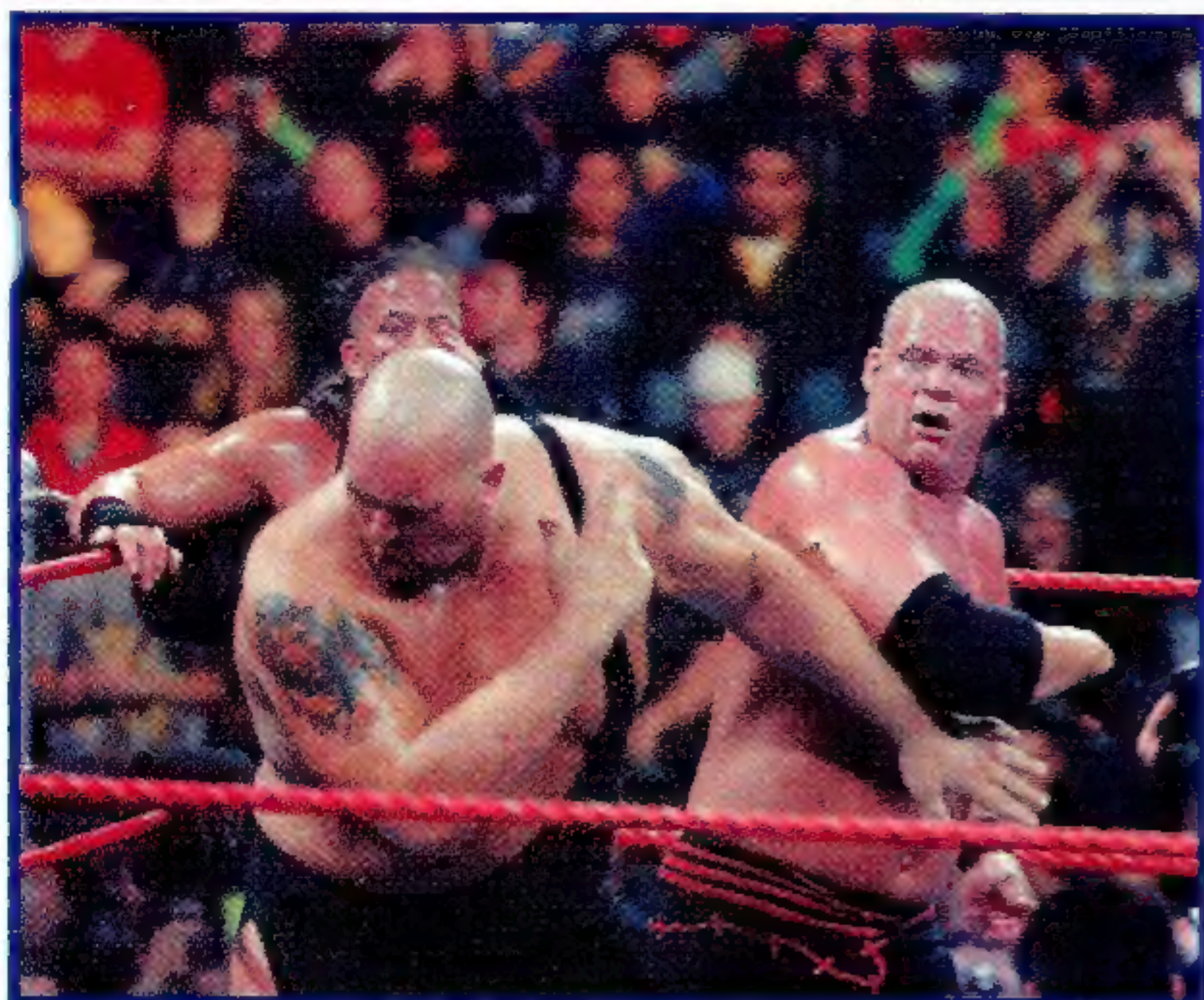
DECEMBER 3, 2006:

Loses ECW title to Bobby Lashley in an Elimination Chamber match at December To Dismember.

JUNE 29, 2008:

Fails to capture ECW title from then-champion Kane in a three-way match with Mark Henry at Night of Champions.





JANUARY 25, 2009:
Fails to win the Royal Rumble match despite being entrant number 30.



APRIL 5, 2009:
Loses to John Cena in a three-way match including Edge for the World title at WrestleMania 25.

NOVEMBER 18, 2008:
Loses to The Undertaker in a Casket match at Survivor Series.

JUNE 15, 2009:
Loses to Randy Orton in a four-way "Three For All" challenge for the vacant WWE World title on Raw.

JULY 26, 2009:
Teams with Chris Jericho to defeat Rhodes and DiBiase of Legacy for the Unified tag team title at Night of Champions.



ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended August 26, 2009

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI
(June 28, 2008; from Joe Doering & Keiji Muto; Osaka, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KAZ HAYASHI
(February 6, 2009; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(March 14, 2009; from Keiji Muto; Tokyo, Japan)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHASE DEL MONTE
(March 7, 2009; beat Billy Bax, Frederick of Hollywood, and Dan Eckos in a four-way match; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: NICK LOGAN
(July 18, 2009; from Rob Eckos; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHA CHA CHANCE & MEGA
(March 7, 2009; from Mike Reed & J.J. The Crew Guy; Newark, DE)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHRISTIAN
(July 26, 2009; from Tommy Dreamer; Philadelphia, PA)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HEATH SLATER
(August 13, 2009; from Tyler Reks; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BO & DUKE ROTUNDO
(July 23, 2009; from Justin Angel & Kris Logan; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: DAVEY RICHARDS
(May 2, 2009; Tyler Black; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ERICK STEVENS & RODERICK STRONG
(December 20, 2008; from Jason Blade & Kenny King; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: RHETT TITUS
(March 28, 2009; from Chris Jones; Crystal River, FL)

IWA: MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: DINGO
(June 20, 2008; from Chuck Taylor; Sellersburg, IN)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHRIS STEELER
(February 21, 2009; from Kevin Knight; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(August 16, 2009; Vacated when champion Hiroshi Tanahashi shattered his orbital bone; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BRUTUS MAGNUS & DOUG WILLIAMS
(July 21, 2009; from Brother Ray & Brother Devon; Orlando, FL)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MISTICO
(August 15, 2009; defeated Tiger Mask IV; Tokyo, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BLUE DEMON JR.
(October 25, 2008; from Adam Pearce; Mexico City, Mexico)

NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MIKE QUACKENBUSH
(May 11, 2007; from Tiger Mask IV; Portage, IN)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RASCHE BROWN & KEITH WALKER
(October 4, 2008; from Phoenix Star & Zokre; Robstown, TX)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 27, 2008; from Amazing Kong; Cape Girardeau, MO)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: LOWRIDER
(July 18, 2009; from APOC; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BENNY THE PRODUCER & ANDREW THE DIRECTOR
(June 20, 2009; from Totally Awesome; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: BEEF WELLINGTON
(July 26, 2009; from Jamin Olivencia; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: EPIPHANY
(August 12, 2009; from Melody; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CHRIS HERO
(July 6, 2008; from Human Tornado; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT & NICK JACKSON
(August 31, 2008; from Jimmy Jacobs & Tyler Black; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: GO SHIOZAKI
(June 14, 2009; from Takeshi Rikio; Fukuoka, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KENTA
(March 1, 2009; from Katsuhiko Nakajima; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AKITOSHI SAITIO & BISON SMITH
(May 23, 2008; from Naomichi Marufuji & Takeshi Sugiyura; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: AUSTIN ARIES
(June 13, 2009; from Jerry Lynn; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS
(April 10, 2009; from Kevin Steen & El Generico; Philadelphia, PA)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MsCHIF
(April 26, 2008; from Sara Del Rey; Berwyn, IL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: ODB
(August 16, 2009; awarded the title when partner Cody Deane pinned champion Angelina Love's partner Velvet Sky in a tag match in which the Knockouts title was on the line; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: KURT ANGLE
(June 21, 2009; defeated Mick Foley, Jeff Jarrett, A.J. Styles, and Samoa Joe in a King of the Mountain match; Auburn Hills, MI)

TNA WORLD TEAM CHAMPIONS: SCOTT STEINER & BOOKER T
(July 19, 2009; from Robert Roode and James Storm; Orlando, FL)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: SAMOA JOE
(August 16, 2009; defeated Suicide; Orlando, FL)

WRESTLING SUPERSTARS LIVE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEITH WALKER
(February 21, 2009; from Ricky Landell; Michigan City, IN)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: REY MYSTERIO JR.
(June 28, 2009; from Chris Jericho; Sacramento, CA)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: C.M. PUNK
(August 23, 2009; from Jeff Hardy; Los Angeles, LA)

WWE UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CHRIS JERICHO & THE BIG SHOW
(July 26, 2009; beat Carlito & Primo Colon; Philadelphia, PA)

WWE CHAMPION: RANDY ORTON
(June 15, 2009; beat Triple-H, John Cena, and The Big Show in a four-way match; Charlotte, NC)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: KOFI KINGSTON
(June 1, 2009; from Montel Vontavious Porter; Birmingham, AL)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MICHELLE MCCOOL
(June 28, 2009; defeated Melina; Sacramento, CA)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES
(July 26, 2009; defeated Maryse; Philadelphia, PA)